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Houseraising—a story

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The Critic as Anti-Hero

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Dean Flower
Eudora Welty Come from Away

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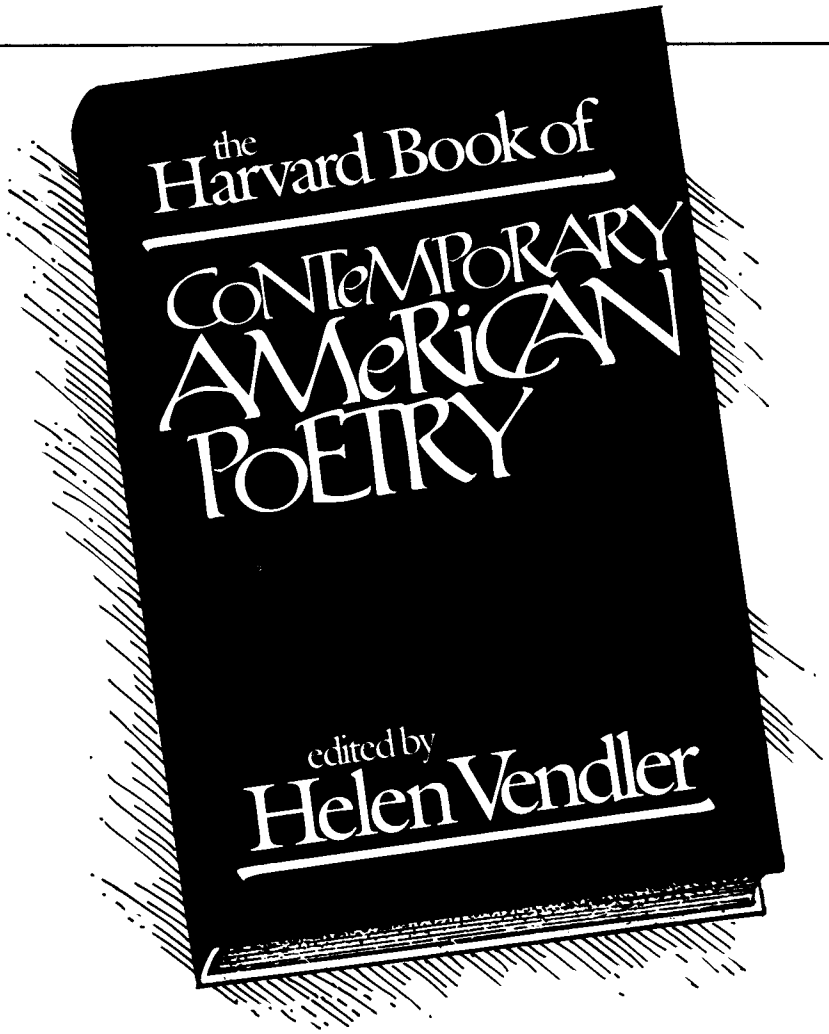

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VOLUME XXXVIII NUMBER 3 AUTUMN 1985

ESSAYS

Tocqueville and the Burden of Liberty — GEORGE WATSON — 365

The Critic as Anti-Hero: War Poetry — HERBERT LOMAS — 376

FICTION

Houseraising — JOYCE C. ALLEN — 401

The Secretsharer — WILLIAM HATHAWAY — 427

POETRY

Exile; Theories of Vision — EMILY GROSHOLZ — 391

A Painful Subject; A Horror Story; Against Commitment — MONROE K. SPEARS — 415

The Out of Commission Navigator; Three Voices in a Diner — MARY TISERA — 419

"To open the Eternal Worlds—"; Fire in the Trees; The Simple Truth about Snow — ALLEN HOEY — 423

In Dark's Cover — ARTHUR GREGOR — 442

The Record; A Difference — WENDELL BERRY — 445

Winter in Minnesota; The Most Famous Waterfall in North America — CHARLES GULLANS — 447

CHRONICLES

Dance — MARCIA B. SIEGEL — 449

Paul Taylor

Film — VERNON YOUNG — 455

"The Purple Rose of Cairo"

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Theatre — JILL DOLAN — 459
"Big River" and "Childhood"
Fiction — WENDY LESSER — 463
Rebecca West, R. G. Vliet, Mary Gordon and others
Poetry — ROBERT McDOWELL — 507
Poets on Poetry series

REVIEWS
Eudora Welty Come from Away — DEAN FLOWER — 473
The wandering theme in Welty's fiction
Faith, Grace, and Love — CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK — 481
"Later the Same Day" and other books by Grace Paley
The Lesson of Henry James — MICHAEL GORRA — 489
James's literary criticism
The Question of George Steiner — JAY PARINI — 496
Steiner's "A Reader" and "Antigones"
The Poetry Competition — ROBERT LEITER — 503
"The Letters of Delmore Schwartz"
The King and His Queens — MARVIN MUDRICK — 520
Books on Balanchine

LETTER FROM LONDON — RACHEL BILLINGTON — 358

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS — 454

TO OUR READERS

We wish to thank the many readers who responded to our Reader's Survey. A brief report on the results will be published in the Spring 1986 issue.

Erratum: The footnote to Harry Goldgar's review, "Hugo's Fiction: Visions of the Master" in the Summer 1985 issue was inadvertently omitted. It should have read as follows:

VICTOR HUGO AND THE VISIONARY NOVEL, by Victor Brombert. Harvard University Press. $20.00.

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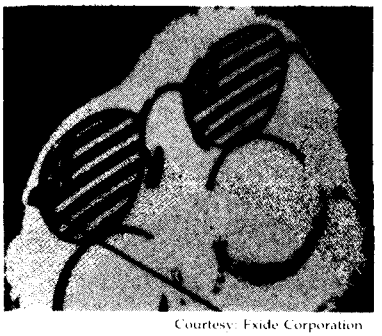

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Letter from London

DEAR H,

For the second year running I am one of the judges of The Standard Drama Award. This is London's major theatrical award and makes theatre-going a serious preoccupation. 1985 opened with the grand presentation of last year's prizes. It was held in the ancient Guildhall in the City of London. It would have been interesting anyway with all the recipients and critics there in force but it was made notable by the presence of the Minister for Arts, Lord Gowrie. As the instrument of the government policy to cut back finance to the Arts—at least that's how it seems to the Arts—his speech was listened to with great care. Unsurprisingly, given his closeness to Mrs. Thatcher, he made a particular point of praising the successes of the commercial theatre; this was clearly meant as a reproof to the "greedy" subsidized theatre. Later Sir Peter Hall, Director of the National Theatre, had a chance to reply. He pointed out that the West End feeds off the subsidized theatre in its use of playwrights, actors and often entire productions which have originated in the subsidized sector. Unfortunately Grey Gowrie missed the point. He had already left for another engagement.

About a month later, I found myself at a lunch sitting between Peter Hall and Michael Codron. Mr. Codron is one of the most successful West End producers, currently presenting Michael Frayn's *Benefactors* which is expected to go to New York. It should have felt like sitting between Reagan and Gorbachev but, of course, it didn't. Despite Lord Gowrie's divisive talk, the two theatres have always been interdependent friendly states. Nevertheless the politics of Arts money was still preoccupying Peter Hall who had just announced the closure of The Cottesloe, the experimental National Theatre, owing to lack of funds. He might have been downcast except that he had just had an approach by the Greater London Council, the London ruling body under threat of dissolution by the government for irresponsible spending. Sure enough, on my last visit to the National (to see a funny, if wild version of *The Government Inspector*), the programme carried this announcement:

> The National Theatre's Cottesloe Theatre, closed due to insufficient Arts Council subsidy, re-opens in the autumn thanks to a special GLC grant.

Sir Peter must be counted a master politician!

The lunch was in honour of Milton Shulman's thirty years as drama critic of *The Standard*. That period has seen an exciting proliferation of small London theatres, almost all subsidized. Unfortunately, many of them are now struggling for survival, even though

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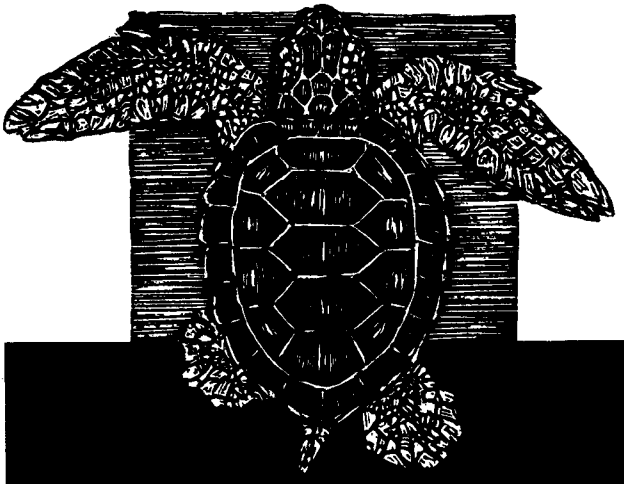

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they're run on the kind of budget which would barely keep the National Theatre in cleaners. Nevertheless, if you want to find the living theatre, with new playwrights, go to The Lyric, Hammersmith, The Bush, The Hampstead Theatre Club, The Greenwich Theatre, The Pit (at The Barbican), The King's Head or The Donmar Warehouse. And, of course, The Cottesloe—when it re-opens.

On the West End Stage, this year looks as if it belongs to Harold Pinter. First, his three latest plays, *A Kind of Alaska*, *Victoria Station* and *One for the Road* opened at the Ambassadors under the general name, *Other Places*. The first two had already been in repertory at the National and *A Kind of Alaska* was also recently produced on television by the B.B.C. while *One for the Road* had its premiere at the Lyric Studio. Having seen all the productions, I was struck again by the way Harold Pinter's work transcends any interpretation. For example Dorothy Tutin's portrayal of the girl who goes to sleep a child and wakes up a middle-aged woman was quite different from Judi Dench's and yet the essential feel of the play remains the same. Again the setting for *One for the Road* was small and dismal at The Lyric but large and splendid at the Ambassadors. This seemed to move the setting of this terrifying story of torture from Eastern Europe to South America but had no effect on the central message.

After the shock of these plays, a revival of *Old Times* written by Pinter fifteen years ago, where the serious core is wrapped up in brilliant comedy, came as something of a change. Liv Ullman played the central part, and it was an immediate popular success. The third Pinter production was indicated by the presence of Lauren Bacall at the party at the Savoy after *Other Places*. This is Pinter as director, not writer, with a production of *Sweet Bird of Youth*. Still another Pinter, the actor, may also surface this year, as the B.B.C. is hoping to persuade him to act in a televised version of yet another of his plays.

For something entirely different, not long ago, I spent a strange morning in the middle of a London park. It was Holland Park and I was opening an art exhibition in the Orangery. Finding myself surrounded by jolly wine-quaffing art-lovers at a time when I'm usually dealing with the week's accumulated household problems, made me very cheerful and grateful to the idea of parks. London parks are, of course, famous for their beauty. But I wonder how many people actually know the enormous variety of activities that go on inside them. Holland Park is one of the smaller spaces but it provides opera, music, theatre, two art galleries, squash courts, tennis courts, a football pitch (cricket in summer), three children's play areas (one forbidden to adults), a playschool, a walled flower garden, much statuary, a Y.W.C.A., wild gardens, woodlands, and animals ranging from tame squirrels and birds to peacocks, pink flamingoes and emus. While I was preparing my opening talk, I

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realized that in the course of fourteen years and four children I'd spent as much time there as anywhere in the world. I'd been photographed there to celebrate my engagement hugging an Indian bean tree (my husband was away at the time) and three years later in a more dignified position when my first novel came out. My first publicized short story was set around the squash courts and my first T.V. play had a scene set in the main walkway.

These were popular thoughts with my audience who, if not artists, were "Friends of Holland Park" and have organized the planting of 2,000 trees to replace those ravaged by Dutch elm disease. Indeed such was the excitement that one applauding lady knocked down a painting which knocked down a stand which knocked over several glasses of wine. "A libation to the Gods of the Park!" I cried, also carried away. Parks have that effect.

Aside from the Orangery, London has had or is having an orgy of major exhibitions. This year there have already been Renoir at the Hayward, Chagall and Edward Lear at the Royal Academy, Stubbs and Francis Bacon at the Tate. The two which have caused most controversy are the Renoir and Francis Bacon shows. The Renoir was not just controversial because no one can agree how great a painter he is or whether he is great at all, but because the show was so immensely popular. This was particularly gratifying for the Hayward Gallery, and here we are back to politics again, because the GLC is planning to take over its management (unless it is itself taken over first, see above) because they consider it too "elitist." I myself tried twice to get in and was defeated by queues of what might be termed ordinary people. Too late I discovered the useful dodge that you can actually buy tickets for the Hayward at the Royal Academy.

The Francis Bacon exhibit is controversial for purely aesthetic reasons. "The world's greatest painter" (the ubiquitous Lord Gowrie's words in *The Sunday Times*) has never been fully appreciated at home. On the other hand, this is his second major retrospective exhibition, which is an unusual honour. It may be that the English appreciation of art tends to the "literary" kind of which he expressly disapproves. Bacon's feeling that painting is its own language obviously makes the critic's task harder.

My own search for a way into his claustrophobic world of naked flesh, led me to find a parallel and a contrast (if the two aren't mutually incompatible) with Renoir's last monumental paintings of the human body. In both cases, the painters are deeply concerned with ways of conveying the texture and colour of skin. Obviously the result is as different as the attitude of the two men to their subjects. But that is what makes the exercise helpful. Renoir was painting his beloved wife, often in an idealized countryside. Her skin is glowing, pink or golden, like a deliciously juicy fruit. The paintings are filled with warmth, sunlight, happiness. Bacon's subjects are almost en-

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tirely men, doubtless also loved, but the atmosphere inside his enclosing vertical lines, is tortuous, even torturous, the skin has the feeling of being flayed to the sinew and gut. Blood does not warm the skin but threatens to flow dangerously outwards. The frantic sense of movement for which he is famous is in enormous contrast to the still peace of Renoir's vision. Perhaps it is scandalous to suggest such a thing but one wonders whether Bacon's supremacy at the moment does not reflect the fashionable appositeness of his desperate view of the world as much as his talent as a great layer-on of paint. At any rate, such thoughts made it just possible to survive a visit to his world—even if I had to follow it with a lengthy stand in front of the Turner (on permanent display in the same gallery).

One thing here that doesn't change is the English weather. Well-read commentators are reduced (yet again) to quoting Cowper, in cynical mood—"our second Winter which we call Spring." The cricket season was more or less washed away until June, and I only managed to count three sun-filled days from September 7th to May 27th. An American writer friend of mine, over here researching for her book on Pierpont Morgan, had to be revived on each visit by a prolonged blast from the fan heater—rather as an addict needs a fix. The British, somewhat tougher (or merely resigned) set off for their usual quota of caravan and seaside holidays. The British birds continued to build and lay—and I have a distinct impression that the incidence of nests in chimneys has increased. It certainly has in the chimney of my house in Dorset where I've just poked down the second large pile of twigs.

Finally, a television preview. The B.B.C. have done it again with a brilliant eight-part serial of *Bleak House*. Dickens' cast of characters is played by actors so perfectly within their roles that it is difficult to pick out the well-known faces. Victorian London, notoriously dirty, smelly and overcrowded, is also fully realized by the use of clever close-up. In general the originality and eccentricity of Dickens' imagination has never been better served. To be involved in Chancery soon begins to sound as threatening as anything dreamt up by Kafka. Perhaps Kafka had read *Bleak House*?

RACHEL BILLINGTON

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GEORGE WATSON

Tocqueville and the Burden of Liberty

A novel can seize on the spirit of the age; and such a novel was Trollope's *Warden* (1855), with which he achieved first success at the age of forty.

The Warden tells the story of a scrupulously honorable old clergyman, the Reverend Septimus Harding of Barchester, who innocently accepts a sinecure at the hands of his ecclesiastical superiors—the comfortable wardenship of an old men's home—until he is rudely forced by the campaign of a free press to give it up. "The tenth Muse," as Trollope contemptuously calls journalism, thunders like Jupiter from Mount Olympus and hounds the kindly old cleric into a resignation from which everyone suffers, even the pensioners. The plot is a paradigm of moderate Victorian thought for the middle decades of the century, and for a good deal of debate since. For it concerns the burden of liberty: a doctrine whose ultimate source (as I wish to argue) is likely to be Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. And the exquisite tragedy that lies at the heart of the first Barchester novel is Trollope's acknowledgement that, while everyone has suffered from Mr. Harding's resignation as warden, an act of intense moral perfection has yet been performed. The novel celebrates what Miss Iris Murdoch has since called "the for-nothingness of good." It is very anti-Utilitarian. Good acts can diminish human happiness on all sides, and yet remain good.

The theme of joyless and envy-ridden liberty was recurrent in the fiction of the age. Dickens was to attempt something like it six years after Trollope, in *Great Expectations* (1861)—a novel about a self-promoting youth called Pip eager to be a gentleman, who wins what he wants at bitter cost to his tranquillity and self-respect. George Eliot was already applying the principle to the still more acute case of womankind. In

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her last two novels, especially—in *Middlemarch* (1872) and *Daniel Deronda* (1876)—self-willed young women make bad choices in marriage (a favorite Trollopian theme) and are punished for it: punished, so to speak, by freedom. The principle is a major element in Turgenev's fiction; and Ibsen from the 1880s was to embody it in three dramatic masterpieces—*The Wild Duck* (1886), *Rosmersholm* (1886) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890)—where a liberty to know the truth, even the dangerous whole truth, destroys those who innocently imagine that sexual emancipation could only be a blessing. And by the 1890s Henry James, in *What Maisie Knew* (1897) and *The Turn of the Screw* (1898), is extending the principle to the young, even the childish—he turns the screw, as he puts it, to make it a child that sees a truth it cannot bear, and gives it "two turns" by adding a second child; and the reader is meant to guess, through a thin veil of dark hints, that (like Ibsen's Hedda) James's two children have learned the facts of life too soon, so that in the last paragraph little Miles appears to *die of knowledge*, so to speak, in the arms of his governess.

It is less this body of fiction itself I want to consider here than its analytical sources. It represents an impressively dark side of Victorian liberalism—a side neglected, even denied, by many modern critics, who have often preferred to see the age as glibly and naively optimistic. My theme here is the tragic dimension of the liberal idea, and of the first great analyst of that new dimension, Alexis de Tocqueville.

All these authors were themselves liberals. They were in no way attacking freedom of commerce or of thought, in the end, but lifting a warning finger against its foreseeable human perils. It is the tragic strength of their position that they never abandon faith; their critique is always conducted from inside a system of belief, never against it. They warn rather than demolish. The rascally and uncaring radical journalists who overturn the prosperity and peace of mind of good men and women in Trollope's novels or Ibsen's plays are, after all, abusing a freedom which in law is justly theirs: the right to print. Dorothea Brooke's high-minded knowledge of the world of scholarship, in *Middlemarch*, oddly precocious and gravely damaging as it proves, or Hedda Gabler's prurient

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fascination with the facts of Løvborg's seedy night life, are a natural outcome of free publishing and free conversation. Young ladies, even children, get to know things. James was to embody the problem in its conversational aspects in another nineties novel tellingly entitled *The Awkward Age* (1899), which concerns the delicate problem of girls too old to be treated as children but still too young to be freely bantered with. Liberalism removed a straitjacket from the advanced social life of Western Europe and North America in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. And free trade and free thought are inextricably mingled, as the age knew, if only because books and newspapers are commodities to be bought and sold. But freedom leaves men free to make mistakes, whether in business, friendship, or love; and those mistakes, like Pip's or Dorothea's, are now bluntly their own fault. So the liberal world does not easily allow for self-excusing, as the hierarchical old world had done. Freedom spells responsibility; and responsibility error, and the oppressive guilt of error.

And yet there is no going back. The burden of liberty would be worth no analysis at all if the new world could return to an old one where thought was unfree, stations in life fixed, and young women bound to accept parental advice on whom to marry. And it is a firm assumption of these novels, plays and treatises that we cannot return. Liberal man, like Milton's fallen Adam, is now free to wander—"where to choose"—except to where he came from. That is why his new freedom, imperative as it is, is a source of anxiety to him. He can get it wrong, as never before; and he can neither lose the memory of an ordered paradise of hierarchy and obedience, or hope ever to recover it.

Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* appeared in 1835-40, to instant and enormous acclaim in France and England. It was a report by a French aristocrat who had travelled on official business in the United States in 1831-2, and it brought its young author fame, honor and membership of the French Academy. Lord Acton called him "always wise, always right, and as just as Aristides"; and a century later Sir Denis Brogan, the greatest British interpreter of America in our times, called *Democracy in America* the best book ever written on the United States and its political system. But until recently it has

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been seldom read through, except by specialists—perhaps because its fastidiously aristocratic liberalism has appealed little to twentieth-century tastes. As early as *Fabian Essays* (1889), Sidney Webb called the book "a classic which everyone quotes and nobody reads." We have lately preferred dark, superstitious cult-theories concerning the sociology of thought emanating from forests east of the Rhine; and even the French, until recently, have preferred the dense jungles of Karl Marx or Karl Mannheim and their successors to the more lucid light cast on them from nearer home. But now a new biography of Tocqueville has appeared in French by André Jardin, and it was the talk of literary Paris in 1984.[1] As the Marxian cult ends, the long task of reclaiming the intelligentsia of the West for liberty has begun, and Tocqueville is its inspiration. The omens are set fair. His civilized clarity of mind suddenly looks engagingly new to a generation brought up on the brouhaha of May 1968 and its long aftermath of disillusion. Political violence daily loses its romance through the sheer familiarity of terrorism; strikes make too many headlines in the industrial West to allow the myth of class war to look anything better, by now, than antiquated and quaint. And where class hatreds have failed of achievement, rationality may begin to prevail. "Wise, right, and just," Acton called Tocqueville; and the spectacle of a lover of liberty who may have been all that takes on a sudden, willful charm.

And some surprises. Most surprising of all is Tocqueville's dark view that individual liberty might prove problematical and burdensome. It was a view that took instant hold in England and America. *Democracy in America* was translated into English as soon as it appeared, and promptly and avidly read on both sides of the Atlantic. On his second visit to England, in 1835, Tocqueville was feted there, meeting John Stuart Mill and beginning a long correspondence with him. George Henry Lewes, the future companion of George Eliot, met him in Paris in 1842, armed with an introduction from Mill himself. Gladstone, as he tells in his diary (8 August 1849), dined with him there seven years later at the British Embassy, when Tocqueville was briefly Foreign Secretary of France;

[1] *Alexis de Tocqueville 1805-59*, by André Jardin (Paris, 1984).

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and in old age, according to John Morley, Gladstone thought him "the nearest French approach to Burke." By then he had been dead for over thirty years. But he had generously called England "intellectually my second country"; and as he lay dying in the south of France in 1859, a copy of Mill's new essay *On Liberty* reached him, sent on by its admiring author. Too weak to read it, in all likelihood, he may yet have felt that a torch had been passed.

Tocqueville had taught Mill, among others, to see liberty as a dangerous responsibility to be borne rather than a right to be claimed and enjoyed. He is the author of mature liberalism, so to speak, as opposed to the utopian liberalism of Shelley and Byron, which was to have no future in the parliamentary state that followed their death by a few years, with the first Reform Act of 1832. In his *Autobiography* (1873) Mill acknowledges Tocqueville as the man who had shifted him from a naive belief in "pure democracy" to that "modified form of it" that Mill had cautiously expounded in *Representative Government* (1861)—a book that appeared in the same year as Dickens' *Great Expectations*. Modified democratic sentiment is based on a sober fear of what Mill, echoing Tocqueville, calls the "tyranny of the majority," along with a dread of centralization based on what Tocqueville had seen of its effects in France. Tocqueville's fear of centralization was soon to be Mill's and Gladstone's. Unless the powers of government can be curbed, the drive towards equality of condition could lead to the worst tyranny there could ever be: "the absolute rule of the head of the executive," as Mill put it in the *Autobiography*, "over a congregation of isolated individuals, all equals but all slaves." When Napoleon III seized power in France in November 1852 as emperor, less than a year after his democratic election as a republican president in December 1851, it must have seemed to Tocqueville a grim, belated illustration of his point, and for the last seven years of his life he lived in retirement from French public life and even from France, writing the *Ancien Régime* (1856) and exchanging letters with like-minded men in England and at home.

As early as 1835, when he reviewed *Democracy in America*, Mill had seen the point of Tocqueville's predictions about the forward march of the new world. The task now, as he re-

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marked in his review, was less to welcome it than to prepare: "not to determine whether democracy shall come, but how to make the best of it when it does come, is the scope of M. de Tocqueville's speculations." On his return from America, Tocqueville had offered the world an alarming vision of a place where, as he put it, "the spell of royalty is broken, but it has not been succeeded by the majesty of the laws," and where a shift towards equality of condition in the non-slave states was intensifying individual hatreds. All that represents a polar opposite to utopian liberalism:

> The division of property has lessened the distance which separated the rich from the poor; but . . . the nearer they draw to each other, the greater is their mutual hatred, and the more vehement the envy and the dread with which they resist each other's claims to power.

Civil liberty, he feared, could all too easily turn joyless. In unreformed Europe, by contrast, he saw placid faces and light spirits; while Americans of the 1830s have "a cloud habitually hung upon their brow" and take their pleasures almost sadly, "for ever brooding over advantages they do not possess."

The point is arresting of itself, and characteristic of its century. History had suddenly dealt two new cards into the pack—democracy and industrialism. By the 1830s both were imminent, if not actually present. Democracy here means male adult suffrage moving—as many believed it must move—towards equality of condition; and it was that alarming tendency that was the main theme of Tocqueville's great book. "America was only the frame, democracy the picture," as he put it. In the United States he had seen the future, and it worked—but not as he might wish. Democracy was wormed in the bud.

Industrialism, that other new card, he treats of hardly at all, as if outside his brief. By the 1830s only Britain in all the world was an industrial state, though some of its techniques were already beginning to pass to the Continent and to North America. By hindsight, at least, industry now looks as vast in its aftereffects as democracy, since it made of poverty, in the strict sense—I mean hunger and homelessness—a choice and an option for the first time. The first growing-pains past, that is, industrial nations in favorable circumstances can reason-

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ably hope to abolish hunger and homelessness—if they choose; and individuals, if they choose, can reasonably hope to be prosperous and educated. That is the choice that Dickens' Pip and George Eliot's Dorothea Brooke made as individuals, in *Great Expectations* and *Middlemarch*: it is not one imposed on them by family or by nature, as it would have been in a novel by Fielding or Jane Austen. No age of mankind had contemplated anything like it before the nineteenth century, or more strictly before those decisive decades that elapsed between Waterloo and the revolutions of 1848. Men can choose: the thought was one to make revolutionaries. It was precisely in those thirty years and more, indeed, that the modern political choice of conservative, socialist and liberal was born.

The choice needs pondering. Before the Enlightenment, popular liberty had been too remote a prospect to excite much in the way of fear or hope; and since the first World War the fear of liberty has become something like a taboo. Jean-Paul Sartre tried to revive that fear in the guise of existentialist agony, it is true, in the 1940s: but modern political systems have usually rejected it, at least in name and in rhetoric. Even dictatorships nowadays take care to describe themselves as democracies, or People's Democracies; and if anyone is afraid of freedom nowadays, it is highly unusual to hear him say so.

Tocqueville's shrewd point confers a uniqueness on *Democracy in America*, then, and on the controversy it immediately provoked: the more so because, like his friend Mill, he was to live and die a lover of liberty. Their critique of democracy was never meant to discredit it. It was meant, rather, to engage attentions more critically, as men might brace themselves for a crisis they will soon have to face. All that is radically different from the mood of the first French revolutionaries after 1789, who failed because they had been unwilling to count the cost of liberty to human happiness until after it had been paid; and radically unlike the fervent libertarian mood of the young Wordsworth or the young Shelley. The 1830s inaugurate a new phase in the march of the liberal idea: more searching, more empirical in its use of evidence since (unlike its predecessors) it now has practical evi-

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dence of popular liberty to use; and above all cautiously, even pessimistically, anti-utopian. A parliamentary idea, in fact, rather than an idea for revolutionary cliques or assemblies: one thing at a time . . .

It was a caution that suited the France of the July Monarchy after 1830, and of the England of the first Reform Bill, introduced into the Commons in the same year. Tocqueville's book came in due season. "In much wisdom is much grief," said Ecclesiastes, "and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow." That might remind us of the wail of Henry James's governess for the children in her charge in *The Turn of the Screw*: "They know, they know!" The new mood of Tocqueville and Mill was not quite as dark as that. But neither did it hold out easy hopes of a human nature newly born again. Men are irreversibly what they are, regardless of laws and constitutions. And what they are they will remain: greedy, suspicious, and fallible. Any theory that neglects all that is a cloudy phantasy, and it is for the political theorist to learn at last to cut his cloth to man as he is.

But what is he? He is, at all events, a creature that needs to be guided and ruled, however constitutionally free within the limits of law. He can be oppressed by freedom. "Thank goodness we don't have to *choose* tomorrow," I once overheard a schoolchild remark to another on the way home one afternoon, presumably from a progressive school. A modern housewife is blessed by consumer-choice, on the whole; but in the biggest supermarkets that there are, her choices can be baffling and even agonizing. The supermarket puts the burden of liberty at its simplest. At its hardest, an openly competitive system can crush the individual, as Mill and Tocqueville first saw, with a sense of purely personal failure: he no longer has the excuse once afforded by the *ancien régime* of being called by God or King to an unchanging status in life, from cradle to grave. Modern feminism has inadvertently achieved something of similar effect, in recent years, for women: with open access to higher education for both sexes, for example, women no longer have the system itself to blame if they fail to reach good degrees or good jobs. And with no system to blame, they blame themselves.

That disturbing conclusion was clearly seen by Tocqueville's first English translator. Henry Reeve, a future editor of

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the *Edinburgh Review*, was a man far less intelligent than Mill; but when he issued a translation of the first volume of *Democracy in America* in the year of its appearance, in 1835, he clearly saw that it was epoch-making, and why it was. The age of Machiavelli's *Prince*, he explained in his preface, was ending; its sequel not yet ready to be written.

> The book of "The Prince" is closed forever as a state manual; and the book of "The People" is as yet unwritten,

as he put it portentously. Autocracy is dead or dying, that is; and democracy, though probably inescapable, has not yet arrived. But when it does, Reeve warns, it may be no less grim in its outlook than Machiavelli's famous book: ". . . of perhaps darker sophistries and more pressing tyranny." Liberty will exact its human price.

The warning was one Mill sought to enlarge on throughout his life as a political theorist. The progress of mankind, as he saw, depends on diversity; and democracy threatens that diversity if it brings equality with it. China, he argues in his essay *On Liberty*, though blessed with a high civilization, had remained "stationary" for thousands of years—whereas Europe had so far saved itself from a Chinese uniformity by its "diversity of character and culture" and by the plurality of paths it has followed. But the writing is on the wall, and it is democracy that is inscribing it there:

> M. de Tocqueville, in his last important work, remarks how much more the Frenchmen of the present day resemble one another than did those even of the last generation. The same remark might be made of Englishmen in a far greater degree,

for though we have greater freedom, we have, by an assimilation of social ranks, a diminishing "variety of situations." Written a century before television became commonplace, Mill's charge against the habits of ordinary citizens and their innate tendency to homogenize needs by now to be redoubled:

> Comparatively speaking, they now read the same things, listen to the same things, see the same things, go to the same places, have their hopes and fears directed to the same objects;

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and he adds, in horror of the prospect of the approaching equality of mass-production and democracy, that "the assimilation is still proceeding," since political changes have recently tended "to raise the low and to lower the high," notably through free trade and wider education. The coming danger to liberty is equality, then—equality of condition.

Mill's horror of such equality is Gladstonian. He was to sit in the Commons as a Gladstonian Member of Parliament from 1865 to 1868, when his leader finally became Prime Minister, voting obediently on the Liberal side. And Gladstone's horror of equality was a byword in his age, though the argument has since dropped from view. That makes of Gladstonism, by now, a highly instructive curiosity. No political party or group in our times, to my knowledge, openly demands greater inequality of condition; so that this aspect of Victorian liberalism, largely forgotten as it now is, might be called mind-enlarging. It is an active principle in the fiction of Dickens, Thackeray and George Eliot, who openly celebrate social differences and disparage mechanical nostrums like the suffrage—George Eliot's *Felix Holt* (1866) is the classic instance—as if they felt social uniformity to be as great a threat to human progress as aristocracy or monarchy had ever been. The danger is that if you give the masses freedom to choose, they may all want the same thing. The whole world, if we are not careful, could turn into California.

The crucial English debate for and against equality began shortly before 1879, when Gladstone won the Midlothian by-election for the Liberals and returned in triumph to the Commons; and it ended in 1889 with the *Fabian Essays* of Bernard Shaw and others. The Liberal leader had laid down a challenge to socialism. He was openly opposed to equality of condition, and proudly called himself an Inequalitarian—a word which, no doubt rightly, he believed he had invented (*Gleanings*, 1879). Mill, meanwhile, on his death in 1873, had left certain "Chapters on Socialism" to be published posthumously in the *Fortnightly Review* in the very year of Gladstone's return to Parliament; and a year before, Matthew Arnold had contributed an article on "Equality" to the same journal. The fight was on, and not only ideologically. Reprinted in his *Mixed Essays* (1879), Arnold's essay derisively

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quoted Gladstone, whom he hated, to the effect that "equality was utterly unattractive to the people of this country" and inequality "so dear to their hearts" that egalitarianism was always happily foredoomed to fail. And in all that Gladstone was a Millite. Communism, Mill had written years before, in his *Principles of Political Economy* (1848, etc.), can never leave any asylum for "individuality of character"; so that an unpropertied society could only prove "a tyrannical yoke." That Communism must prove tyrannical, and by its very nature, was clear to the greatest of British liberal theorists as early as 1848, the year of revolutions and of Marx's *Communist Manifesto*. It cannot sensibly be argued, then, that liberal theory was taken unawares by the socialist case in the 1840s, or that it allowed it to pass unanswered. By its very nature, it believed, equality is tyrannical and unprogressive.[2]

Mill's answer, like Tocqueville's before him, was a salutary warning to the West. And the West, it may be nervously suggested, has appeared to heed it. Social equality is not now an active hope or fear in America or in Western Europe—and still less, paradoxically, in the socialist East. The reasons are hard to pinpoint, and it would be rash to fix them on a single book. Skepticism about high taxes in the cause of undiscriminating welfare has mounted; millions imagine, and perhaps rightly, that an equal share of little is less exciting, as a prospect, than a larger share of more. The West has not gone what Mill once called Chinese, or what a recent song has called Ticky-Tacky. In spite of democracy and advancing industrialism, we remain—most of us—individually distinct: we look different, we sound different, we seek ardently to distinguish ourselves. What Rousseau once memorably called "la fureur de se distinguer" grows no less. Whether we have been helped, in all that, by Tocqueville's warning a century and a half ago is unclear. But certainly the voice of that great Frenchman, "wise, right and just," who in the end saw as much to hope for as to fear in the democratic experiment, no longer sounds lonely or unheard in America or in his native land.

[2] Mill admittedly revised this section (II.i.3) intensively, though without radical change of argument. See *Principles*, edited by J. M. Robson (Toronto, 1965), p. lxxiv.

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HERBERT LOMAS

The Critic as Anti-Hero: War Poetry

A critic has to by-pass his appropriate humility before a hero who died young, and far more dignifiedly and expertly than he can imagine himself doing or wanting to do. A million men died in the Battle of the Somme alone—the numbers don't cheapen the human sacrifice—but Wilfred Owen's poems are still a literary-critical question. And the critical question is inevitably an impertinent enquiry into that capacity for sacrifice.

Before what could fuel an Owen industry[1]—and perhaps create a bad model for poets—it's good to hesitate. Moreover, there's something in me that responds, ambivalently, to Yeats's disesteem:

> He is all blood, dirt and sucked sugar-stick . . . he calls poets 'bards', a girl a 'maid', and talks about 'Titanic wars'. There is every excuse for him, but none for those who like him.[2]

"How can they use such names and not be humble?" as Sassoon wrote of the non-combatant Keats and Shelley. Yet there's something uncomfortable in Owen's very heroism, as in all that generation's. In "Lines written on my Nineteenth Birthday" he had this:

> . . . No joy is comparable
> Unto the *Melting*—soft and gradual—
> *Of Torture's needles in the flesh. . . .*

Admittedly the melting is into relief from pain, but the for-

[1] WILFRED OWEN: THE COMPLETE POEMS AND FRAGMENTS, edited by *Jon Stallworthy*. W. W. Norton. $65.00.
[2] *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. by Allan Wade (London, 1954), p. 874.

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mulation is masochistically ambiguous. The war objectified a depression and aspiration for many young men. And Owen too was, at first, understandably short on insight into the complexity of himself and his situation, and is better without the straightforwardness that appeals to some minds. Contemporary readers, especially young men, can be off-putting too, visualizing him as an almost fictional character, the poems like war films, or war games.

Yeats, who thought we make rhetoric, or propaganda, out of our quarrel with society, and poetry out of our quarrel with ourselves, had correctly identified that Owen was a "rhetorician." Yeats savagely proposes an imagery commensurate with man's actual savagery:

> If war is necessary, or necessary in our time and place, it is best to forget its suffering as we do the discomfort of fever, remembering our comfort at midnight when our temperature fell, or as we forget the worst moments of more painful disease. Florence Farr returning third class from Ireland found herself among Connaught Rangers just returned from the Boer War who described an incident over and over, and always with loud laughter: an unpopular sergeant struck by a shell turned round and round like a dancer wound in his own entrails. That too may be a right way of seeing war, if war is necessary; the way of the Cockney slums, of Patrick Street, of the *Kilmainham Minut,* of *Johnny I hardly knew ye,* of the medieval *Dance of Death.*[3]

War is unstoppable, not within the freedom of the individual. The only consolations are rest and savage or transcendent joy:

> Yet they, should the last scene be there, . . .
> Do not break up their lines to weep.
> They know that Hamlet and Lear are gay;
> Gaiety transfiguring all that dread.
> All men have aimed at, found and lost;
> Black out; Heaven blazing into the head: . . .
> "Lapis Lazuli"

When hope and prudence are gone, everything lost, and known to be lost, the soul glimpses its grandeur. Against a

[3] *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse,* ed. by W. B. Yeats (Oxford, 1936).

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tragic view like this, Owen's "elegies" are announced as a warning rhetoric for pacifism, explicitly dissociated from glory, consolation, even poetry:

> Above all I am not concerned with Poetry. My subject is War and the Pity of War. The Poetry is in the pity—Yet these elegies are to this generation in no sense consolatory. They may be to the next. All a poet can do today is warn. That is why the true Poets must be truthful.

Auden, MacNeice, Spender and Day Lewis had turned to Owen for guidance in writing poetry influentially reverberant to current history. Paradoxically, they had turned to Yeats for the same reason: early, Yeats had claimed it was natural for an Irish poet, though not for an English one, to be a public poet. But by the thirties Yeats had certainly outsuffered any activist notions of "public" and was, though not invariably, remorseful:

> Did that play of mine send out
> Certain men the English shot?
> "The Man and the Echo"

Robert Graves never forgave Yeats for his rejection of Owen and was not included himself in *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse* but is often close to Yeats in feeling: "For God's sake cheer up and write more optimistically—the war's not ended yet but a poet should have a spirit above wars."[4] Graves's "Two Fusiliers," suppressed like all his war poetry, celebrates war-*élan* and blood-brotherhood:

> By wire and wood and stake we're bound,
> By Fricourt and by Festubert,
> By whipping rain, by the sun's glare,
> By all the misery and loud sound,
> By a Spring day,
> By Picard clay.
>
> Show me the two so closely bound

[4] *Wilfred Owen: War Poems and Others*, ed. by Dominic Hibberd (London, 1973), p. 121.

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As we, by the wet bond of blood,
By friendship, blossoming from mud.
By Death: we faced him, and we found
Beauty in Death,
In dead men breath.

The braggadocio and even eroticism of this would be matter, in Owen, for *pudeur*. Replying to Graves in "Apologia pro Poemate Meo," he did make admissions but names "murder":

Merry it was to laugh there—
Where death becomes absurd and life absurder.
For power was on us as we slashed bones bare
Not to feel sickness or remorse of murder.

Owen's excuse for not celebrating these transports is that they are too popular already, in the imaginations of civilians who do not purchase them with pain.

Owen's compassion has been attacked from another angle by Jon Silkin:

> A small but recognizable part of Owen's adult practice as a poet tends to tie in with the rather grandiose and portentous response *officially* given in England to compassion. . . . to elevate compassion into a religiose sentiment, thus making innocuous any enquiry as to the state of the victim and the cause of his suffering. . . . It is at once politically expedient and morally less taxing as a mode.[5]

He has particularly in mind "Anthem for Doomed Youth":

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
—Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.
No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—
The shrill demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

[5] *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, ed. by Jon Silkin (London, 1979).

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What candles may be held to speed them all?
  Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
  The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing down of blinds.

With "the sad shires syndrome" the poet "sentimentalizes the picture if he only mourns."

Yet in spite of Silkin's very valid cautions, "Anthem" is one of Owen's most verbally adroit poems. The connections are witty, the epithets reduced and serviceable; many of the lines could have been *said* in a moment of passion and inspiration. The play on "pallor" and "pall" shows the cool control. There are none of Owen's paddings and inversions. The whole neat structure is cinematic, spectacular and acoustic; and both octave and sestet end with unforgettable lines.

Nevertheless "Anthem" is still wearing fin-de-siècle frills, whereas "Dulce et Decorum Est" is made out of plain words, harsh images and anger. The poem is a loaded rifle aimed at cheering civilians. The rhymes never falter, and the images are like the photographs of the wounded Owen used to pass round in Blighty:

If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent tongues,—
My friend, you would not tell with such high zest
To children ardent for some desperate glory,
The old lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.

Even in autumn 1917, when Owen produced "Anthem" and "Dulce," he could write as wetly as this:

When I awoke, the glancing day looked gay;
The air said: Fare you fleetly; you will meet him!
And when the prosp'rous sun was well begun,
I heard a bird say: Sweetly you shall greet him!

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"Anthem" is the first result of the encounter with Sassoon, an astonishing hatching, astonishing Sassoon, who only then took him seriously.

Yeats's inclusion of Sassoon in his *Oxford Book of Modern Verse* was an aristocratic preference. Sassoon often catches a warrior-caste contempt for death and hell. The reader can be pricked to an intuition of his own capacity for recklessness. There is pugnacious abandon and joy in his hurling of the MC into the Thames. He has a sportsman's disgust for the war. His poems are a more potent call to *do* something about the war than Owen's and certainly than Graves's. Sassoon has the confidence of a class with money, status, influence and the power to make changes. Perhaps this infected Owen, with his resignation of a depressed genteel class, even more than Sassoon's poetry and criticism. He set an example of brutal frankness for the Keatsian, almost Novelloish Owen:

> "Could anything be worse than this?"—he wonders,
> Remembering how he saw those Germans run,
> Screaming for mercy among the stumps of trees:
> Green-faced, they dodged and darted: there was one
> Livid with terror, clutching at his knees . . .
> Our chaps were sticking 'em like pigs . . . "O hell!"
> "Remorse"

There are those who see a hook-up between stance and style—and those who deny it. At any rate, Sassoon can wobble, and he never rises to the sad glamour Owen achieves in a few poems—yet he never descends to Owen's banalities either (until his unexpectedly feeble poems after the war), and his verse has a lean, sturdy march:

> In winter trenches, cowed and glum,
> With crumps and lice and lack of rum,
> He put a bullet through his brain.
> No one spoke of him again.
> "Suicide in the Trenches"

Even at the end, Owen still could fumble with a mound of muffling words. "Spring Offensive" is possibly his last poem, sent in a fair copy to Sassoon, but not having the chance of further revision. Potentially fine, much admired, it ends in

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awkward cacophony, archaism, pale Danteisms, unenglish syntax:

> But what say such as from existence' brink
> Ventured but drave too swift to sink, . . .

The other stanzas, however, don't puff and blow:

> Of them who running on that last high place
> Breasted the surf of bullets, or went up
> On the hot blast and fury of hell's upsurge,
> Or plunged and fell away past this world's verge,
> Some say God caught them even before they fell.

Even the best stanzas have awkwardnesses like "Of them who running on," "deepened sheer to infinite space," "Mightier than his whose bounty these have spurned" and the handy hell-props, only with difficulty redeemed by felicities like

> where buttercups
> Had blessed with gold their slow boots coming up.

Against this view, Stallworthy writes:

> In "Spring Offensive" and "Smile, Smile, Smile," the figure of the poet does not appear, and the greater objectivity of his later poems is a measure of his maturity and the distance he had travelled from his egocentric boyhood.[6]

I prefer the more overtly "subjective" poems: they are more vivid, and all poems are subjective. "Smile, Smile, Smile" is otiose, developing an epigram-thought long after the point is taken, and amateurish in parody. Difficult to believe it was the same poet who wrote "Exposure," which draws on experienced agony, and where the metaphysical is suggested by the factual. Romantic echoes are ironical: "Our brains ache." The pastoral blackbirds, crickets and mice are hallucinatory in the snow and ice:

[6] *Wilfred Owen: A Biography*, ed. by Jon Stallworthy (New York, 1975).

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Pale flakes with fingering stealth come feeling for our faces—
We cringe in holes, back on forgotten dreams, and stare,
snowdazed,
Littered with blossoms trickling where the blackbird fusses,
—Is it that we are dying?

Another admired stanza would be better omitted. The question "What are we doing here?" was stronger than the answer:

Since we believe not otherwise can kind fires burn;
Nor ever suns smile true on child, or field, or fruit.
For God's invincible spring our love is made afraid;
Therefore, not loath, we lie out here; therefore were born,
For love of God seems dying.

A pity as it would be to lose the last line's fourfold ambiguity, insincerity has provoked bad syntax, generalities ("child, or field, or fruit" instead of "the blackbird fusses") the numbing vagueness of the third line, and an untruth—"not loath."

"Strange Meeting" has a claim to be, in Sassoon's words, "Owen's ultimate testament, his passport to immortality, and his elegy for the Unknown Warrior of all nations." Dominic Hibberd finds the poem obscure and clarifies:

> Owen looks back on his masters (i.e. Shelley, Keats, Dante in Carey's translation, Sassoon) and on the lessons he was beginning to learn from them about the messianic task of a poet in society; but he describes not what he *will* do, as in the earlier drafts, but what he *would have done*. . . . After the war, there will be either complacency or revolution, and a mass-retreat from social reform; the poet could have brought about right thinking and peace had he lived—but he will not live. . . . and after death comes only sleep, the passivity Owen had always dreaded. . . . The soldier-poet, however, is a killer and he kills a poet who is both his equivalent on the other side and himself.

The poem has serious faults, apart from the offending "Titanic wars." The relentless pararhymes are a distracting dance rather than the mournful music admirers find in them. The dead German's argument is muffled not only by verbosity and repetition but by his fascination, surprising in the dead, with Owen's rhyme-scheme:

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Courage was mine, and I had mystery,
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery: . . .

The self-encomium goes on in an unconvincing *Endymion*-dialect:

I went hunting wild
After the wildest beauty in the world,
Which lies not in calm eyes, or braided hair,
But mocks the steady running of the hour,
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here. . . .

Hunting evokes Sassoon, and Owen is mourning the waste of the poetic gift, romantically conceived, personified in the German, and the social consequences. But do we believe in the Bosche's "mastery"? And what are "chariot-wheels" (though obviously from *The Triumph of Life*) doing in this Great War context?

Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels,
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.

Wordsworth does not remove these crippling disabilities. Yet even with them—and a defense could be mounted for all of them—the poem more than partially succeeds.

Its last paragraph is a noble and dignified *dénouement*:

"I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark: for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now. . . ."

Sleep is not death: they are already dead. The need is for rest and oblivion (though Henri Barbusse said "When I am sleeping I dream that I'm killing him again!").

Behind Owen's poem is the insufferable memory of men's faces as the bayonet enters their bowels. The "strange meeting" is more than the strangeness of meeting after death: it is that intimate intercourse of murder between strangers, ex-

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changing ecstatic or frowning looks like lovers, now eternal friends. As exhausted lovers they will sleep together. This subliminal suggestion, the heart of the poem (almost obscured by the earlier monologue) has pervaded the language nevertheless: "tunnel," "groined," "encumbered sleepers," "probed," "Lifting distressful hands as if to bless," "hunting wild / After the wildest beauty in the world. . .," "I would go up and wash them from sweet wells," "I would have poured my spirit without stint / But not through wounds," "through me as you jabbed." The wound of love, the bleeding hymen, has been ousted by the killing wound: "Now men will boil bloody and be spilled."

Both Owen and Sassoon find irony a mask for admitting the inadmissible, as in Sassoon's "The Kiss": the bayonet is "Sister Steel":

> Sweet Sister, grant your soldier this:
> That in good fury he may feel
> The body where he sets his heel
> Quail from your downward darting kiss.

Two years later Owen picked up the theme in "Arms and the Boy":

> Let the boy try along this bayonet blade
> How cold steel is, and keen with hunger of blood . . .

In "Greater Love," one of Owen's most daring and therefore disliked, as well as admired poems, he makes a contemptuous and yet genuinely and overtly erotic misapplication of the machinery of courteous love poetry:

> Red lips are not so red
> As the stained stones kissed by the English dead.
> Kindness of wooed and wooer
> Seems shame to their love pure.
> O Love, your eyes lose lure
> When I behold eyes blinded in my stead.

The sibilants and unpleasant rhymes are spat out, and even

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the pun on "stones" as testicles may be conscious. Speaking on "To Any Beautiful Woman"—the original provocative title—he doesn't shirk presenting bayonetting as a parody of sexual intercourse:

> Your slender attitude
> Trembles not exquisite like limbs knife-skewered,
> Rolling and rolling there . . .

Educated by the war, Owen is bypassing the censor and divulging therapeutically, clinically.

Many things that live in darkness die in light. Of course, war is "the continuation of politics by other means," to win, extend or defend markets, raw materials, energy, cheap labour and influence; and the generals seek promotion and power. But how do they enlist ordinary decent mother-loving men? How can the politicians, generals, salesmen and chairmen who organize the battlefields enlist the whole male population (apart from a few eccentrics) and the womenfolk too if needed for any purpose whatsoever, comparatively fair or foul? Most soldiers have no idea why the war is being fought—it even takes the historian a little time to find out.

Apart from the overt calls of "defense" and patriotism, why that joy "as swimmers into cleanness leaping"[7] before the foul mephitis of the trenches? Why is there said to be less mental illness in war than in peace? Why do men run around with erections on the battlefield? Why does Owen gloat over his first slight (training) wound and try to squeeze a drop of blood out?

The public schoolboys who were mostly dead by 1915 were inspired by Homer, and read him even in the trenches. Early discipline, the Boy Scouts, ignorance of economics and politics, *angst* in the face of the lonely choice and freedom, group psychosis, xenophobia, fear of the white flower and contempt of women all help. Today we have *Star Wars* to prepare the next generation. Wasn't it Stonewall Jackson who said "It's a good thing war is so terrible—otherwise we might grow too fond of it"? War is "the greatest of all games,"[8] arousing even

[7] "Peace," by Rupert Brooke.

[8] *The Muse in Arms*, by E. B. Osborn (London, 1917). Cf. *Homo Ludens*, by Huizinga.

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more team spirit and skill than football, inspiring the love, admiration and hatred of comrades.

To enlist is to get away—from the boring office, the demeaning role, and the boring wife: to evade the parents, dodge the exams, postpone decisions, scent sexual adventure, travel, legally shed decency and normal restraints, drink with a gang, glitter with uniform, find an antithetical self and self-transcendence in a hero's death, more like immortality than conclusion. The final words from Owen to his mother were a favourite quotation from Tagore: "When I go from hence let this be my parting word, that what I have seen is unsurpassable." While other men were fighting for their motherland, he wrote to his mother, he was fighting for his mother. This might sound innocent to a pre-Freudian generation. In the license to murder, does a soldier find a displacement of the inadmissible rage against father, siblings, surrounded by all the phallic symbolism of war machinery? Penetrating with the bayonet, does he find an outlet for unadmitted homosexual yearnings? In accepting the bayonet in his bowels does he fulfill his masochistic fears, fantasies and needs? Sadism is certainly released not only in the killing but in the power to "fuck men about" and in the power over life and death, like that of a god.

It is part of Owen's achievement that he comes to adumbrate all this, sometimes very clearly: war has extended his threshold of insight. He could hardly have gone further at his age, in his time, under his pressures, though he might have turned into a worse fuddy-duddy than Sassoon surprisingly did. He wrote a little over a dozen other poems (besides those mentioned) that are good, some very good, like "The Sentry," about Owen's first casualty as an officer: the blinded man cries in the dark "I see your lights!"—"But ours had long gone out." There are perhaps another nine that are interesting because he wrote them, or for an image or a situation. Not a bad achievement, a handful of major poems, for a man of twenty-five. He looks best in a rigorously selected edition backed up by letters (many stunning) and documents, as in Hibberd, though even Hibberd's is indulgent at times. An editor ought to serve Owen as ruthlessly as we hope he would have served himself.

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The Stallworthy edition is a monument, instructive, beautiful, scholarly, a credit to the publishers, who also include Oxford and Chatto. I'm not convinced Owen would have wanted the evidence of his fumblings so clearly laid out. It's not as though he were a settled master, like Yeats, whose every correction can train a young poet. Perhaps there's a place in literature, as in nature, for what Teilhard de Chardin calls "the suppression of peduercles," or the extinction of origins and early forms. Stallworthy's notes don't add a great deal to Hibberd's on the relevant poems, but he has discovered a more complicated and revealing estimate of Owen's chronology through a study of the paper: the poems were in progress over a considerable period, and Stallworthy's arrangement shows the poet's latest intentions, and all his drafts, a "map" of his development—"the most comprehensive and detailed edition of a twentieth-century poet writing in the English language."

The Oxford Book of War Poetry,[9] also edited by Stallworthy, begins with the Bible and Homer and ends with Peter Porter. A little over a third of the book takes us through Horace, *The Battle of Maldon,* Chaucer, Marvell, Dryden, Dr. Johnson, Byron and Tennyson. The first war poet with a modern sensibility is Whitman, well backed by Rimbaud and Dickinson, and a little more fumblingly by Melville. There are good models for the First World War poets in Hardy and Housman. Fifty pages are on World War I, fifteen on the Spanish Civil War, ninety on World War II, twenty-four on contemporary wars.

After a warning note from Johnson, we have to wait for Coleridge and Shelley—Byron is both against and for war—to get a *serious* doubt about military enterprise, and till World War I to get a clinically enquiring spirit. Stallworthy attributes the modern distaste for war to technology, which has eliminated the sportsmanship, or chivalry, as it was called.

Perhaps the most interesting poets belong to World War II. "Where are the war poets?" was the cry—but they were there, though not writing what was expected of them. Keith Doug-

[9] THE OXFORD BOOK OF WAR POETRY, edited by *Jon Stallworthy.* Oxford University Press. $19.95.

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las is here, though I missed his "How to Kill," an incisive witness of how murder gets into the soul. Henry Reed's "Lessons of the War" were the two poems, catching the excruciating boredom, most relished by British infantrymen. Jarrell, Dickey, Karl Shapiro, Louis Simpson and Lincoln Kirstein bring that anti-heroic tradition of the private, untouched by Homer, distrustful of the officer. There has to be the reviewer's niggle about exclusions, but I'm surprised Geoffrey Holloway's *Rhine Jump,* vivid paratrooper experience, and Bernard Gutteridge's reports from the Burma campaign are overlooked. One poem from Alan Ross's naval war is not enough; and instead of the bad poem by Gavin Ewart there could have been several good ones. The first third of the book is a little dull, partly because some, though by no means all, of the translations are a little plodding. Stallworthy distrusts flamboyance, but surely Christopher Logue's *War Music* should have found its way in? Dramatic poetry is excluded altogether; but Shakespeare, an anthology of war poetry himself, would have been difficult to select from.

There's a great war poetry yet to be written: the war poetry to end war. It would need an older man, battle-scarred and God-enlightened. Shakespeare nearly wrote it. Probably only God could.

I miss the war poetry the troops sang because it expressed their profoundest feelings:

> When this *fucking* war is over,
> Oh how happy I shall be!
> When this *fucking* war is over,
> No more soldiering for me.
> No more church parades on Sunday,
> No more polishing of brass,
> We will tell the sergeant major
> To stick his passes up his arse.

I would have thought any poet worth his slim volume would give his literacy to have written that—and to have heard it sung on route marches all over the world, simply because the soldiers loved it.

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EMILY GROSHOLZ

Exile

Letters from La Plata

I

Blood sickens the air today.
It drifts from the pampas, from the cattleyards
out of the past to contaminate the future.
I fear the present uncertain compromise
of military and civil authority
will soon reverse itself
to pour a scarlet pest on all our houses.
So from this heartless south,
this paradise demons have won and lost,
I send my love with only a few words.
Perhaps my solitude, the dislocation
of Spanish into English, slow my voice.
Yet truly our conversation never ceases.
You are for me a diffuse and concrete presence
that circles in my blood,
revives in each fresh impulse of my breath.
I sleep for only a few hours at night,
teach all day and gather with my friends
discussing strategy till early morning.
My children wait to see me on the weekends.
I miss you. Patience, distance, stoicism
are all I have to offer; my desire,
the shape of desire written on the air.

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Interval

So are all Distances contracted in the Soul it self, and there Understood *Indistantly* . . .
—R. Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678)

I saw the love-light first kindle your eye
in *Pupille*, a little bar in Saxony.
Philosophers' congress. Cold November rain
dissolved the window into constellations,
flocks and spirals of reflected streetlight.
Two days you dazzled me, then disappeared
like a star falling under the horizon.
Now at the center of the Southern Cross
you burn obscurely in my memory,
dark retina that repossesses heaven.
So as the sky's imagined hemisphere
is compassed by the pupil of the eye,
all distances contract within the soul
and there are understood indistantly.

Tonight again, a luminous cold rain.
There must be as much reality in the cause
as in the dear effects: so from your hand
covering page after page of blue, I read
the true determinations of your heart;
and this autumnal weather writes again
your face across my eye's inverted glass.
We took each other with a sweet unreason
that crossed the boundaries of body and place.
For thought of a mile, of ten thousand miles,
even the semidiameter of earth,
takes up no greater room within the soul
than the short interval which parted us
that night, until you closed it with a kiss.

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II

A poet in this country can only describe
the drama of uncertainty and loss
in an orphaned idiom,
a broken language without history.
Who listens to my verses? My dead friends?
My girls, imprisoned, tortured, or in exile?
The past has slowly disappeared behind me.
Today I write to you while drinking *maté*,
a kind of Indian tea favored by those
who are poor and mad. You see that I am both.
This government is like a drunk, vindictive
and unpredictable guardian
who sets up the rules one day
in order to countermand them on the next,
so all its baffled children are bound to err.
The latest news is that the agency
for research refused my work on Galileo.
Four hundred years of conceptual advance
mean nothing to those religious men, who find
in science only reason for suspicion.
(You notice, however, they don't mind buying arms,
the most contemptible and stupid offspring
of Galileo's great intelligence.)
"Blind Galileo, father of the moon."
I like the way your poem honors the past,
its bitter losses and his own
long stubborn recollection of the truth.

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Exile

At the antipodes, where clouds of herons
darken the waves and fish circle in air,
where palm trees fall asleep, bury their branches
as if the heart of earth were another sun,
our winter is your summer. So you leave
the city, traveling south over the pampas
to where the unquiet waters of La Plata
melt into the sea's dark consolation.

Your small white house faces on the ocean.
Bougainvillea glitters on its walls,
viridian spangles and a private fear
staining your foreign journals, books and papers.
Perhaps the man next door, hired to survey
your various pursuits, will be surprised.
"Tell me, professor, yesterday afternoon,
who was that woman standing in the doorway?"

Sunlight angles through the vivid leaves.
She waits beside you in her light green dress
as if a winter rose opened in summer,
dream of a shadow, creature of a day.
You cannot see her. "No, I have no secrets,"
you answer. "Come and look. You were deceived
by the shadow of bougainvillea on the doorsill.
I live with that strange girl, my solitude."

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III

I enclose two leaves from my dear ginkgo
whose history is strange (and so, quite real).
Its parent tree arrived here from Japan
in 1882, an Emperor's gift
to celebrate the founding of La Plata,
and like a monument grows in the park
around the corner from my parents' house.
In fact, many Japanese have settled here,
and one of them, a friend,
promised me a *bonsai* from this ginkgo
upon the occasion of our hundred years.
At first it was a flawless little tree,
fragile and wise. But after a few seasons
I saw it grew too fast,
excessively, becoming a kind of dwarf
without a place in the great chain of being.
The more I watered it, the more it grew
ambiguous and all out of proportion.
Today I think of us, and of my tree.
For we are neither the simple artifice
of an affair, nor the natural expanse
of love with room to breathe,
foliage of such complexity and grace
it weaves a second sky. I mourn for us.

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The Carnival of Dreams

The ancient Greeks supposed
blood the seat and transport of our thought.
And so it seems, for midnight
brings you back embodied like a fever
though you were driven from my waking hours.

Those letters ceased, that brought
our endless talk across ten thousand miles,
the slow mail interjecting
weeks between each question and response,
time out of time. I guard the everyday,
surrender to my dreams.

So early morning greets me in confusion.
I stumble to the kitchen with your face
redoubling my vision,
hands still warm and fashioned to your body.
Let my cup of coffee be the charm
that chases you back to another country.

The carnival of dreams suspends
time in sweet illusory perfection,
focussing our spirits till they burn
like gunpowder roses, whiskey, memory,
gold flowers in the blood.

However often you come back again
to that bright labyrinth of tents,
you'll find me there.
Embrace the girl you see
three times; three times your open arms
will close across the incandescent air.

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IV

No, I can't meet you anywhere right now.
Be patient with me, dear, never forget me.
I need the warmth and solace of your letters
but Argentina holds me here
like a netted fish; my life is not my own.
You know I must still support
my parents, younger brother and two children
on a salary inflation always reduces
to dust by the month's end.
Whenever I leave La Plata, my little girls
ask the same question: When will you come home,
papito, come to live with us forever?
And I stay on to teach philosophy
for my students, the young people, my own soul,
although my work is dangerously wounded
without the books I need.
Books! Those most desirable, necessary
creatures of the spirit, form and substance
of any innovation. They're never ordered;
sometimes they simply vanish in the mail.
Be patient if you can, and more clairvoyant,
as I so often see you on the street,
the broken pavement by my parents' house,
in darkened restaurants and crowded busses.
This difficult circumstance
allows no motive or strength for mere caprice.
I guard my love for you from hour to hour
just as I watch my children while they sleep.

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Theories of Vision

1

Train the eye to see
colors long faded
from the marble throat
of Immortality;
colors past the sill
of our red and purple,
sheer embroidery
on petals of the white
violet, white rose.

Train the hand to draw
straight lines, circles
true as the simple
motions of the planets
and elements that fall,
so the empty brush
above white paper
traces to their source
rivers of the air.

The heart, impatient,
tangled in her lines
of stress, red traces
of dead or living passion,
must come to learn
with hand and eye
certain renunciations:
the brush run dry,
not sensual vision.

2

Timid and fluid rainbows
over the nacreous surfaces
of shells, on peacock feathers

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and soap-bubbles, appear
whenever incident light
reflects off nether and upper
laminae of films, one wave train
tagging after another
like a younger sister.

Destructive interference!
Which, for a given thickness
of film, only allows one color through.
So, on the peacock's wing,
here it is royal purple,
there it is blue:
quarrels of luminous children
crossing, of space and time,
the unending recess.

3

On the lawn of trampled strawberry and clover,
your daughter blows across her plastic monocle
sending down a shower of bright bubbles,
rainbows clasping their selvages at every corner.

Rise, oh rise, she says, fantastic creatures,
though even she must see the midsummer air
is powerless to hold them, as the colors
drown, all the invisible hands let go at once.

4

Visible light goes in
the eye's black iris
(flowering at the margin
of a broad white river)
and never comes out again.
But absorbers are good emitters
and black is best,
so the eye also releases

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(fresh circles on the river)
a different radiation
invisible to itself, that runs beyond
the roots of crimson, darker
than wine, or blood.

5

Green leaves along the broken bough
drink sunlight, breathe our element.
We lose each other every night
but dream of the recurrences
that unexpected morning brings.
There is no other way of having,
so the red-lipped branches sing,
and our waking answers them.

So the scarlet voices chorus
as the world begins to fall.
Every longer evening brings us
home to supper by the fire
where the last light, slowly breaking,
fans its rainbow on the wall.

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JOYCE C. ALLEN

Houseraising

Jennifer met us at the county road. Jennifer with her hair cut short, shorter now than Daniel's was. Too much trouble taking care of it, she told us, when you haul your water from town. Her hair was the color of a good piano. Short, it curled around her narrow face and the sun picked lights from it.

"You're good to come," she told us, kissing Stuart, hugging me. "Come on up. There's a keg."

"Tell us what to do," Stuart said.

"Oh I don't know." She waved at the logs stacked at the side of the road. They were ponderous logs, notched at the ends, weathered to the gray of old forests.

"To start with, we've got to get those to the top. They're marked. Daniel has it all worked out, I think."

She led us up the driveway. It was just a strip cut through the woods, not scraped or graveled yet. She walked ahead of us, a short woman in T-shirt and cutoffs and men's work shoes, with tanned, mosquito-bitten legs, without fat, with thighs in which you saw the muscles move.

"The people who live around here call this Dobson's Mountain," she told us. "I guess it would seem like a mountain if you never saw anything higher."

Everybody was at the top of the hill. There were people we knew and people we didn't, and children, and many dogs, and guitar cases leaning against trees. There was the beer keg sitting in a tub of ice. There was the old camping trailer Jennifer and Daniel had borrowed to live in till their house was built, and in front of it was a board-and-sawhorse table crowded with foil-covered dishes. Stuart made a place for the fruit and cheese we'd brought.

Beyond the table was the space they'd cleared for the house. The shape of the house was outlined in string tied to

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sticks. At intervals along this posts were set in cement to hold the log walls.

Daniel, in overalls, and no shirt, was stretching a tape measure from post to post. Like Jennifer, he had grown muscular since they'd lived out here. His chest and arms had broadened and hardened. His face looked permanently sunburnt, already like the face of a farmer.

It couldn't have been a better day for a houseraising. A day you wouldn't believe—sunshine warm as summer flooding the forest, dry leaf smell like the smell of clean beginnings. Some of the men had stripped to the waist. Women tied their shirts in knots under their breasts. Somebody's little boy ran around naked as a frog, squealing. An amazing day, and November, late November.

North Carolina bestows such days sometimes—holds up on winter, tries to tell you it was nothing but a bad joke, that there will be no winter after all, there will be no difficulty, no hurt, no dying. It will always be summer, we will always be strong and wise and love each other and live life as we dream it. Lies, but we believe them on a day like this.

The logs at the foot of the hill, that were going to be Daniel and Jennifer's house, used to be a tobacco barn. Hadn't used it for years, the farmer told them. Have it for nothing if you clean up after yourselves. The farmer lived in the next county. He hadn't heard yet that you could get money for old tobacco barns around here.

"It took us all summer and half the fall to find it," Daniel said.

"We went out looking every weekend," said Jennifer. "And after work most evenings too. Every time we saw an old barn or something we'd go up and ask. We thought we'd be living in it before now."

"I'd like to get it done before the weather turns," said Daniel. "At least the walls and roof."

"You know what they're asking now for barns like that?" said Jennifer. "You wouldn't believe it."

"They can sell any kind of junk building," said Daniel. "If it hasn't fallen down, somebody will pay for it. I've seen shacks for sale that were so rotten you could stick your finger through the wood."

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Daniel's brother Gary had come down from Virginia to help. He wanted to do something like this himself some day. Daniel and Jennifer took off work and the three of them spent a week tearing down the barn. It was harder than they had thought it would be. The old barn had been built to last. They had pried and hammered and wrestled the logs from their places, one by one. One by one they had carried them to the rented logging truck, one by one loaded them on.

"I stuck my crowbar in a big old wasp's nest," Gary said. "One of those great big gray paper ones. Back in a corner. I didn't even see it till it was too late. Holy shit."

Gary looked a lot like Daniel. Younger, but the same kind of face, wide at the forehead with a long chin, gray-green, thoughtful eyes, the same wiry light hair.

"We couldn't do anything the rest of the day," said Daniel. "The wasps were everywhere."

"Gary had stings all over his face and hands," said Jennifer. "He was so swollen he couldn't touch anything. And one time Daniel almost picked up a copperhead."

"I'm pretty sure it was a copperhead," said Daniel. "It had those diamond shapes and a triangular head. I thought it was part of the log."

"You were stoned," said Gary. "It was nothing but an old hognose."

They hauled the logs to the foot of Dobson's Mountain. They placed the string, dug the holes, cut and leveled the fat posts. They poured the cement and Jennifer printed her name and Daniel's in it and drew a heart around them. And now here we all were with food and guitars and children and dogs and the gift of a perfect Indian summer day.

It was the middle seventies, and everybody we knew was going back to the land or talking about it. "Going back to the land" wasn't the same thing as "moving to the country." It was more like a religion, although most of us would have denied that we had a religion. It was supposed to save us.

We had to have a religion. We saw the news, we read things, we were scared, we wanted out. It looked to us as if our whole world was going to hell, one way or another. You couldn't guess what the last disaster would turn out to be. It was a toss-up. Everybody thought about the big one, of

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course, the nuclear one; but even if we missed that there were still the long slow ones, the chemical, industrial, technological ones, all the small, endless, boring poisonings of the planet. Whatever hit its limit first. Or maybe there wouldn't be a single disaster, but only the accumulation, strain on strain, until it all collapsed. It was the Corps of Engineers mentality that would destroy us, we thought, the insistence that the rest of nature was nothing but a sort of useful subfloor to our constructions, nothing really to do with us.

We saw things differently—we, the saved. We thought of the earth as a living thing with every part depending on every other part. We saw ourselves as no more separate from the rest than water circling a stone for a while is separate from the lake. Drop in a pebble or a gram of dioxin and the ripples spread forever.

We were trying to go back to the way it used to be before it all got out of hand, or the way we thought it used to be. The pioneers were our heroes, the ones who went off by themselves and lived off their land, and were touched by the spasms of civilization, if at all, months later by slow mail. We talked about self–sufficiency. We thought we could make a place to stand on that wouldn't slide away under our feet when the rest of it started to go. The point was independence, most American of virtues.

That was the way Stuart and I thought about things then. I guess we still do in some ways, only we don't feel anymore that you can opt out. I guess we feel that even if it worked, if somehow you really got it all together and survived whatever kind of mess the rest of the world got into, and if there were a lot of other people who didn't, it wouldn't be a happy kind of survival. All ripples spread forever.

Not many of the ones who went back to the land had ever been there before. They came from the suburbs, the universities. They were in their late twenties or their thirties. They had marched against Viet Nam, protested the nukes, maybe done acid a time or two, grown older. They were married, or as good as. They spoke of themselves in the plural, as resolutely coupled as their grandparents had been. They were long-haired, concerned, liberal, white. They had neither last names nor nicknames. Many were vegetarian. Almost none had ever held a chain saw.

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Daniel stuffed the tape measure in a pocket of his overalls and stood up. "Well, maybe we better get going," he said. "First thing is to bring up the logs. What I thought was, we could get them most of the way with the pickup, but I'll need help loading them on. Okay?"

He climbed into the Chevy pickup which sat, with a battered flatbed trailer hooked on, at the top of the driveway. As many of us as could piled on the trailer, balancing our foam cups. Everybody else followed behind. The pickup swayed down the hill and rattled to a stop beside the pile of logs.

A competent looking woman who had said her name was Elizabeth—single straw-colored braid and a Save the Whales T-shirt—jumped down, gripped her cup in her teeth, and took hold of one end of a log. She looked surprised. I saw the veins stand out on her arms. "My God," she muttered around the cup.

I pulled up on the other end. The log didn't budge. I'd never tried to move anything so inert. Stuart took my place and I moved to the middle. We tugged and pulled and counted to three and pulled together and finally dragged it over the end of the trailer. The trailer staggered when we shoved it into place.

It took a long time to load up. We all kept getting in each other's way, or lifting too soon, or trying to push when everybody else was pulling. But we kept at it until the flatbed was packed with logs, several layers deep and symmetrically mounted.

Daniel looked at them and grinned, and wiped his hands down the sides of his overalls. "All right," he said. "Couple more trips now and we'll be in business." He got in the truck and started the motor.

The truck ground and scraped and didn't move. He got out again. He came around and stared at the logs for a while. "Okay," he said at last, and began dragging the top one off.

We grouped up again to help. We took off log after log. They lay massively where we dropped them.

When the load was down to a meager few, the truck consented to move. It groaned and suffered its way up the hill and stopped firmly where the driveway ended, a hundred yards or so from the house clearing. The logs would have to be carried the rest of the way, through uncut woods, or worse

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than woods—through a no-man's-land of sawn-off stumps and branches and undergrowth and abandoned shovels and scattered cinder bricks; all the detritus of housebuilding.

Six or seven of us took each log. At first we held them downward and waddled sideways with them like a regiment of crabs. Then somebody up the line called out—a definite bass voice you had to believe—that it would be easier if we got them up on our shoulders. We tried that. It was easier, but not much. We shuffled to the house site, bent forward, with the logs cutting into our shoulders, trying not to kick each other.

Jennifer and Gary measured the logs as we dropped them and read the crayon markings on their ends that showed where they had to go.

"Third up, right front."

"Eight south."

"Six west, left side of window."

"Wait a minute. West here or west where we got it from?"

"Isn't it the same thing?"

"I can't remember."

"Shit."

It turned out we hadn't brought any of the logs for the bottom row. Daniel took the truck down the hill again. This time we read the markings before we loaded.

The second load started the house. Daniel and Gary and a man in a sky-blue tank top who looked as if he must lift weights heaved the first log onto its posts. Everybody cheered. They set the next one on the opposite posts, the third into the notches of the first two, shorter ones on each side of what would be the door. Somebody brought cups of beer. Jennifer ran up with a camera.

There we must be now, crowded into that first square of logs and squinting at the sun, Daniel standing front center. Daniel, sunlit, confident, hamming some, with his plastic cup raised like an Olympic torch. Grinning, flecks of wood dusting his arms, buoyant pale hair sprayed out around his face with sunlight shining through it, looking like a strong young haloed saint.

"That's your father," Jennifer can say to children not conceived then. "That was when we built the house."

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The work began to fall into a system. Daniel and Gary and Farrell, the weightlifter, stayed at the house placing the logs. The rest of us made up shifts to take the truck down. When we weren't working we stood and watched, drank beer, tossed somebody's bright green Frisbee back and forth, wandered in the woods finding squirrel holes and holly trees and mushrooms that might be okay but you'd want to look them up. Always a guitar was being strummed. Always children shouted, dogs roamed.

The woods were magical; not deep in shade any more, the way they had been a month ago, but luminous. Sunlight pooled on leaves and needles, heated them, drew from them a sensual smell. The warmth eased open the pores of our skin, seemed to smooth the corrugations of our brains. Trees that were the soft silver gray of old coins laid ribbons of shadow across the forest floor. Branches shone with their own white light in a sky as innocently blue as a child's painting of sky. Ten-point-something acres of woods sloped away on all sides. Every way you turned you looked through straight trunks of hickory and oak and maple, here and there a cluster of pine. Every way you turned you looked down a hill and a hill to farther hills rising.

"You couldn't see all this last summer," Jennifer said. "It was all grown up and green. The leaves moved all the time. It was like living under water."

I had finished a shift and was ready to rest. Carrying the log had been like carrying gravity itself. When we'd lifted it a black widow spider had clambered out, a polished, wicked lady in black patent leather with, yes, the scarlet hourglass on her belly—we saw it before she ran away like a handful of elegant fingers running up a keyboard.

Jennifer and Elizabeth and a woman named Laurel, who had come with Farrell, sat on a blanket near the beer keg. Laurel cradled a guitar as if it were a child.

I filled a cup and came over. "You have to pay extra for the spiders, Jennifer?" I asked.

"Oh God," Jennifer said. "I heard about that. Be careful, will you, we don't have any insurance."

Laurel brushed a series of soft chords from the guitar strings. "Can you believe truly living here?" she asked. "I

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mean waking up in the morning here?" She spoke slowly and very quietly, almost in a whisper. It was the kind of voice that seems to expect you to listen, a gently Southern city voice. You did listen to it, you had to, as if the next thing it said might be important. She was a slender woman, tall and flexible as a blade of grass as she bent over the guitar. "There's nobody around to tell you what to do," she murmured.

Jennifer nodded and looked pleased. "That's really the point, isn't it?" she said.

"Get your stove, Jennifer?" asked Elizabeth.

"Well, not the one we wanted. The cast iron one. They're out of sight now. We got one of those with sheet metal around the side."

Elizabeth smoothed a leaf over one of her knees with a square brown hand and seemed to be thumbing through a mental file on wood stoves. "Yes," she said finally. "Those are all right. You do have to replace the liner sometimes. You'll use a little more wood but you might have less of a creosote problem." Elizabeth's voice, not at all Southern, was brisk and definite.

They talked about stoves, solar heat, the differences between post-and-beam construction and stud wall, Ken Kern's Owner-Built Home or Rex Roberts' Engineered House, how many layers a wall should have and relative heat loss through thermopane and storm windows. They sprawled on the blanket in the sunlit woods, thin, serious women with well-brushed hair; they argued about windows on the north side or only vents and how wide you make the overhang. They had opinions about these things. They all knew somebody who had built a dome and it leaked, or else it didn't. They had all gone to a housebuilding workshop, or were going to soon.

Somebody started a joint around. The smoke had the smell the forest had, penetrating and softly sensual.

The pickup waddled down the drive and up, down and up. The crews strained under the logs. Long hair was tied back. Sweat shone on the backs of the men, the arms of the women. The workings of their bodies showed, the swell and pull of tendon and muscle. If you saw a painting of them now you might not guess their century. I thought of Egyptian slaves hauling stones for the pyramids.

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"However do you suppose they built that barn in the first place?" Laurel whispered. "There couldn't have been fifty-hundred people carrying."

"How do you think the homesteaders did it?" asked Elizabeth. " A thousand miles from nowhere out in Dakota or someplace? Maybe just a man and woman all by themselves. They did it, that's all. We could too if we had to."

"I don't know," said Jennifer. "They must have been in better shape than I am. I hurt places where I didn't even know I had places." She stood up and brushed off leaves and stretched and rubbed the small of her back.

We went down the hill again. We shuffled another load of logs to the house. Slowly the log pile diminished. Slowly, slowly, the walls rose.

There was lunch. Laid out on the board table—salads, cheeses, sprouts, slices of onion and pickle, loaves of dense dark bread. Tofu with some kind of herb in it. A bowl of something that looked like beach sand and was the color of cooked salmon. Guacamole and tacos. Cider and fruit juice and beer without limit.

We talked about power.

"Well, I think solar when we get it worked out. We'll have to start with wood, of course."

"It was a whole weekend on solar greenhouses. You can bring up the efficiency seventeen percent if you do it right."

"We can't say we're serious till we cut out fossil fuels altogether."

We talked about building.

"What we have in mind is a sort of modified Rex Roberts."

"Cedar. Don't use anything else. Resists termites, you don't have to treat it with anything."

We quoted the *Whole Earth Catalogue*, the *Mother Earth News*. We recited heat loss statistics, yard-foot prices.

"You're going to have one hell of a time with the inside, you know, Daniel," said Farrell, gesturing with his sandwich. "Beams, floors. There isn't a real right angle in the whole place."

"Oh, I'll work it out," Daniel answered calmly.

Scraps were brushed from the boards and pounced on by dogs. The pickup ground into motion again.

The crews got smaller as the afternoon went on. There

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were mostly men working now. A sort of unstated competition seemed to have grown up, having to do with the way you swung a log onto your shoulders, the energy with which you marched it to the house.

Laurel and I went down one more time, but the men waited too patiently for us as we struggled with the log, slowed for us too obviously as we carried it. We stayed on the hill after that with the children and the dogs and the other women who had abandoned the contest.

A looseness spread through the afternoon. People lay back on the leaves. Some slept. The keg flowed magically, and now and then a joint passed from hand to hand. Some children went off in the woods giggling, then came back and put on a play. The plot was hard to follow, but there was a lot of hitting and falling down. We clapped and whistled when it was over.

"If I lived out here," Laurel said, "I'd never leave at all. I'd forget how to drive. I'd grow moss."

The sun moved down the southwest. Shadows elongated. Too soon. But it was easy to forget it was November.

The light glowed yellow behind the unfinished walls. The last load of logs was brought up. The men who brought it drew themselves beer and collapsed on the leaves.

"Is that all?" Jennifer asked.

"Better believe it," one of them told her.

"Not a splinter left down there, little lady," said somebody else.

She crumpled the cup she was holding and threw it at him. "Well let's eat then," she said.

Casseroles were brought from cars, heated one or two at a time in the little trailer oven. Fruit was cut, more bread laid out. A pot of coffee on a gasoline burner added to the air its clean and rational smell of goals achievable.

The glow deepened to an opalescent pink. We piled food on paper plates and filled cups and ate and drank as if we hadn't been doing it all day. We sat on the ground and talked only at intervals.

"Some houseraising," Stuart said once. "All we've done all day is bring up the woodpile."

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"Doesn't matter," said Daniel. "Think how many days that would have taken us alone."

The light coalesced to a broad red band against which the walls stood up black and became something more ancient, more strange—the wreck of a Viking ship, the fossilized ribs of a dinosaur.

"Rex Roberts is a sexist," Laurel said slowly.

"You think everybody is a sexist," said Farrell, who sat behind her with his forearms resting on her shoulders and a foot planted on each side.

"You especially," she said, and snuggled back.

Night rose from the undergrowth. The woods filled with night from the bottom, as a lake fills with water. A chill came with the dark—not a true November chill, but it no longer felt like summer. Shirts were put back on. People brought out sweaters.

Jennifer gathered paper plates and sticks and some ends of logs and piled them in the fireplace—a circle of soot-darkened rocks in an open spot near the trailer. Before she lit the fire she laid a sort of grill over it, a thing that looked like a shelf from an old oven.

"We have to be awfully careful," she explained. "You can imagine what a spark would do out here."

The fire she made, spare and contained as it was, enclosed us. We tightened our circle around it. The fire completed the coming on of night. Whatever diminished light the woods still held went out. The woods themselves backed off, lost definition as maple, oak, pine; became an impermeable blackness. No one went out there now, or went only when it became essential—there had been a lot of beer—and only for the briefest time. You could imagine things out there. You could hear them, holding their breaths.

When they built the little homestead cabins they would have had fires like this at night. Out there alone, swallowed in mountain valleys or exposed on prairies, more alone than we would ever be, they would have to have fires. A fire would be more than warmth or protection from animals. It would be cities and laughter, family more than the two of you, solace, sanity. The space the fire lit would have seemed, as it seemed

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to us, the only human space there was. Even though this light was nothing you could count on. It leapt and flickered, flashed objects into brilliant view and then extinguished them. Faces, hands, appeared in one place, then another. Nothing held still long enough for you to catch hold.

We didn't care. We rested in this unstable light, all our edges softened with alcohol and marijuana and fatigue earned righteously, and had a wonderful party. The ones with guitars played them—Joan Baez songs and Judy Collins and Simon and Garfunkel. Laurel's hair swept her strings as her head swayed with the music. We sang and talked and said silly things and laughed at them helplessly.

Stuart held my hand. Jennifer lay back with her head on Daniel's lap. Daniel leaned against a tree and kept looking toward the house. You got a glimpse of the house now and then when a flame licked up—a black, barred shape with the woods behind it.

We stayed late. We felt good—hopeful, the way you feel at the start of a new project, and strong, and that there was a point to what we all were doing, and that it was the most worthwhile thing we could possibly do. There's no better way to feel than that.

A wind came up in the night. By morning Indian summer had blown away. You'd never mistake the season now: November, nearly winter.

The sky was a dirty white and erupted now and then in a spatter of rain. I turned up the thermostat. The heat came on with a click and a whine. Stuart looked past the Sunday paper and said, "Maybe we ought to go give them a hand with the house."

"Maybe so," I agreed.

But we didn't hurry. We passed the paper back and forth and drank more coffee and watched the blank sky.

By the time we got to Dobson's Mountain the air was saturated with a dank mist that was almost, but not quite, rain and almost, but not quite, freezing. Only Daniel and Jennifer and Gary were there. They had nailed together some two-by-fours to make a scaffolding. Daniel and Gary were up on that hauling a log into place with a system of ropes and pulleys.

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They both had on heavy sweaters with long underwear showing at the necks and knitted caps pulled down to their eyebrows. On the ground Jennifer, in a thick shirt and padded vest, stretched a tape measure along a log.

Nobody was saying anything. The three of them moved mechanically, as if they had been going through exactly these motions for as long as they could remember.

"What can we do?" Stuart called.

Daniel looked down as if he hadn't seen us till then. "Oh," he said. "Hi. Well thanks." He pushed his cap back and wiped his forehead in the same one-handed movement, without letting go of the rope. His eyes kept going between us and the log. I had the idea he was trying to make a place for us in his mind. It was as if we had jarred some implacable rhythm that had been set up here.

Gary stood with his hands flat on the log and waited. Jennifer looked around at us but didn't say anything. Cold seeped under my collar and up the sleeves of my jacket.

The walls were a few logs higher than they had been last night. In this light they looked dead black. I thought how wide the spaces were between them, how much would have to be done before the house was tight. These were rough logs, irregular as the trees they had been. The cold would blow right in. The rain would blow in. You don't have to chink a tobacco barn.

Finally Daniel said, "Well, you know, I think it's pretty much under control. You might hand up a couple of beers if . . . how's the keg, Jennifer?"

"You can still booze it up," Jennifer said shortly. "Help yourselves," she said to Stuart and me. She smiled, but it wasn't much of a smile.

Last night's fire was a heap of sodden ash. A couple of orange peels and a squashed paper plate lay on top of the grill. The keg still stood in the tub, which was filled now with ice–cold water. Stuart pumped it. Improbably, beer spurted out. I filled cups. Beer wasn't what you wanted on a day like this. Too cold. Too bitter. Too much like the day. It was also going flat. Stuart passed cups up to Daniel and Gary. Jennifer shook her head no and went back to her measuring.

If you wanted anything, it would be brandy. Brandy and

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an indoor, fireplace fire, and a good book. But flat beer was what there was, and mist sinking into the leaf mold and the few leaves left on the branches—dead winter leaves—making a harsh sound as the wind blew through them.

"I told you six feet," Daniel said. He sounded elaborately patient.

"You used all the sixes dammit," Jennifer snapped. "I told you three times."

"Measure. Them. Again." Daniel spread the words apart. Gary stared off into the trees.

I stood back beside Stuart and drank my beer. After a while I said, stupidly, "It looks like a lot of work."

Jennifer, her back turned, shrugged.

"Well, you know, that's the way it is," said Daniel. Sarcastically? Not quite. "You do a job like this. Then you get up and do it again the next day. That may come as a surprise to some of those folks."

He and Gary, their lips stretched back with strain, shoved a log into its notch.

I watched them. I was thinking about how, finally, the choices are made, the options narrowed, winter after all comes on. No matter how you decide to play it. I also wondered how much any of us understood about independence.

There didn't seem to be any use in hanging around. I looked at Stuart as he nodded to me.

"Guess we'll go on," he called to Daniel. "Let us know if you need anything, okay?"

"You bet," Daniel called back, but I wasn't sure he'd heard.

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MONROE K. SPEARS

A Painful Subject

I. METAMORPHOSIS

When Gregor Samsa woke to find himself transformed
He seemed to be a large disgusting insect.
I wake daily to a more gradual transformation
Not into bug, but something equally strange and repellent,
A metamorphosis more chilling than any in Ovid.
Girl into tree or star or spider, man into stag or flower
Strange life flowing in the veins instead of blood,
This is exciting, fascinating; and even better
Stones into men, statue into living girl.
Joyce's characters seem not to mind their endless process
Flowing as they talk into rivers or hills or mythical types.
But my transition seems to be endless and painful both.
Like Gregor, I become less than human,
Possibly smelly or unpleasant,
To be hustled out of sight as quickly
  as the humans can arrange it.
To go from adult to old man
Is truly to change into another species
Apart as a lame duck, having no space in the future.

II. PALINDROME

Though we have known, at least since Heraclitus,
That the way up and the way down are one and the same,
It is not often noted that there is also
Between growing up and growing old a surprising symmetry.
After sixty, as before fifteen, one's age is public knowledge
And counted in public even to fractions of a year.
One is preoccupied with sight and hearing
  and bodily functions.
In spite of fear of falling

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The basic accomplishment of walking looms large and precious.
Sleep and food must be just right, and strength not overtaxed.
The adult's sense of mastery, competence, being in control
Becomes a memory. It is almost like
Reversing a film, or reversing any event in Newtonian physics
Except that it isn't funny.

III. HAYDN OLD, OR THE JOY OF AGING

Unlike many a genius, Haydn was beloved:
Generous to his rivals, faithful to his wife,
Religious, hard-working, charitable and kind,
A great artist and a truly good man.

But he lived too long. After *The Seasons*
He recognized that his seasons were finished:
Nothing but Winter now; no more rebirths.
But the Spring stirrings were still there;
Ideas pursued him "to the point of torture"
Though he no longer had strength to work them out
Or even write them down. *The Seasons* finished him, he said.

What do you do after you've written *Hamlet?* Well,
If you're Shakespeare you write *Othello, Lear,* and *Macbeth.*
But even for Shakespeare, the question keeps coming up
And eventually there's no answer. He retired, of course,
But even after *The Tempest,* that greatest farewell to the stage,
He couldn't really leave it alone:
In his last years he had a hand in some dreadful hackwork.

Faulkner, when at last he won fame and money
Faced two decades of declining powers.
Einstein, early honored, lived forty years in frustration
Rejecting the quantum, pursuing the unified field.
After dazzling early success, Rossini spent forty years
Composing only a little church music.

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Hawthorne spent his later years trying to write novels
That came apart in his hands.

Why can't the artist break his staff and drown his book?
Does he need his art long after it needs him?

A Horror Story

The world around me seems to be growing larger.
All distances are longer, everything I lift is heavier.
The whole universe is expanding, I know,
  but the red shift in stars
Is not what troubles me. Can it be
That I am shrinking?

  It's like growing up, but in reverse,
  and faster.
In the long days of childhood, with infinite slowness
  the world began to shrink
Until, full grown at last, I found the rooms
  and furniture and sidewalks
So vast and intimidating in childhood
To be now ridiculously small, touchingly easy to master.

But now it's turning around again. I am not what I was.

What should I do? Call a shrink? What I need is an unshrink.
If I could only find a bottle, as Alice did,
To stop the process. But the bottles I find
Labeled *Drink Me* stop nothing, though they help forget.
Whiskey is not an effective giant-killer.
But, with a bow to Joyce,

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The children may as well play, since
The ogre will come in any case.

The Incredible Shrinking Man became a mouse-sized creature
And went in terror of his cat. Domestic coziness
Turned monster, and was out to get him.
I suppose, like him, I'll shrink until at last I disappear.

Isn't that, in fact, what does happen to us all?
We become dimmer and grayer, and gradually
Like Tithonus, dwindle to nothing but a voice.
And then that goes too.

Against Commitment

While you debate which breeches leg goes first
Said Johnson, Another boy has put on both
And you stand still; Sir, meanwhile your breech is bare.

To win, Coach said, You got to really want it.

But I'm not sure at all I really want it
And if my breech is open to the breeze
Like Pangloss' wife I'll stand half-assed, undaunted,
Until I find what locks will fit my keys.

If nothing ever fits, those keys will dangle
Forever on the wall, and rust unused;
Better to wait than push and force and mangle
For action's sake, to prove that I can choose.

For Johnson also thought it didn't matter
Which shoe went on which foot; while any clod
Whose feet hurt knows that's madder than a hatter.
The Great Cham sometimes could be very odd.

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MARY TISERA

The Out of Commission Navigator

"When it comes to direction
I can always count on your choosing
the shortest
route between two points. Just say
when to turn right or left, when to swing
in the middle lane, speed up, slow
down—oh, what would I do
without you, my love?"

That was last year's commendation.
I've since been replaced
by a twenty dollar Pittsburgh Street Atlas
and a front seat mate
who disavows knowing her right
from his left. She blinks when he absent-
mindedly asks her which way
do they turn now.

I see his midnight blue Omega pulling over.
I see him memorizing his love, half-
delighted she is so uninformed,
giving him more room to maneuver, half-
mournful it will now take longer—
they will be late—to reach his destination.
She grants him her out-of-focus
smile and all is forgiven.

While he tracks down that Atlas
loafing on the back seat,
I lie prone on this rudderless bed,
all sense of direction gone,
on stand-by for stars

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lost on this black ceiling sky.
Locating the right page,
he cruises handily out of my range.

Three Voices in a Diner

Praise the lord, looks like snow again.
Any good soul spring for coffee?
Saving my bucks to build a new
box guitar. My aim to bring back
Rock and Roll, the pure music.
Sleep up the beach a ways. Where
the wind can't have at me. Pray
to Jesus and that wind whistles out
with the tide. My van's snug.
Got it stuffed with rags, the ceiling
wallpapered with news from
round the country. On days
when nothing happens, I lie back
and make out old news. Never the same
story grabs me. Know what went on
five years ago in Boise, that's
Idaho, the potato, and Houston
last month. Could've stayed there
but thought to catch spring beat
its drum along this coast. Besides,
we're flush with New York City
where they're hungry for talent.
Once I get my guitar in working
order, I'll head there. Here,
I got my van, my own tools,
good people like you two.
Got another cig I can borrow,
a match to spare? What brings you
all to Roy's? His old lady bakes
the pies herself. First rate. Uses
lard. None of that shortening shit.

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Listen, young feller, you too old
to be knocking around, not settling
down to raise a peck of kids,
the wife, the house, the works.
Didn't hurt me none. The wife, she died.
I had to go somewheres. I figured
she always hankered to see the ocean.
What the hell: here I am.
Rooming house on the boardwalk, facing out.
The sun comes up bigger and redder
than back in Iowa. Could be
the water that makes the sun fan out.
I do just fine. Got my hotplate.
The landlady looks the other way.
And when her son's on the road
she invites me down.
Her corn fritters top drawer.
She's wise to my nipping too.
Didn't stop her from trotting
out the whiskey Christmas Eve.
If I was you I'd kick back home
while time's on your side. Now me,
I'm home as I'm ever going to get.
The undertaker can toss my bones
out to sea. Won't bother me a whip.
But you, you got your whole life,
box guitar or not. Rock and Roll
ain't the beginning, end of it.
If you clean yourself up
some girl will sure to turn
an ankle your way. 'Til the day she died
my Mabel had the ankles of a girl.
Can't beat that. Hey, Lady,
cat got your tongue? New to town?

Don't I wish. Just passing through. Here
we honeymooned seven years ago.
Some kind of joke, that, he chossing
our love nest to inform me
he's leaving next week. Right
this minute he's calling her

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with the good news, or maybe flopped
in the twin bed mooning. Last time
we went King Size all the way.
Guess everything happens to plan.
Why else end where we began?
That first go round, summer,
we made love on the beach. This visit,
winter. And get this: he can't feature
being unfaithful to Carol. That's
her name. I had a cousin Carol.
Just think. Carol's been on call
all these years for her name
to land on my lips. Only
she couldn't know what she was
waiting for. Such innocents,
the lot of us—events in line,
itching to fall from some cosmic
conveyor belt. Hell, whatever
we do, wherever we go, life
overtakes us soon enough.
All this talk isn't worth the air
it's scribbled on. Hey guys,
anyone for pie? Come on,
I'm treating. Suppose this gesture
made to order, and if I hike
into the sea on a full stomach,
that too will be ordained.
Make mine apple, two scoops
vanilla on the side.

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ALLEN HOEY

"To open the Eternal Worlds—"

—Blake, *Jerusalem*

Blake, I thought of you all morning as I
ran the hills outside of town, finding just
a mile into the country such profusion
as I wonder if you ever saw: golden
rod and mullein, and those ragged purple
blossoms I cannot find a name for;
and thistles, daisies, and a multitude
of trees. A squirrel leapt once and startled me,
and not half a mile farther a grass snake
basking on asphalt. And the air alive
with birds!—sparrows and robins, goldfinches
shimmering the silver leaves of willows,
and the shadow of a hawk spooling round me.

I thought of you, my feet seeming not
to pound but kiss the pavement, as though
the nubs of wings had sprouted from my shoulders;
not enough to bear me off the ground,
God forbid!—I wanted some spirit of the earth
to enter through my feet, to keep me
thus suspended midway, caddis-like, between
elements: purified but not completely
freed of dross, like a fire, feeding
on the air and shimmering like smokeless
heat across the pavement.
I thought of you,
thought of you and the sheer multiplicity
of finitude, dropped as we are, shattered
vessels, in a world of things, scarcely
capable of bearing spirit when it falls

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or rises into us, dread weight. And yet,
and yet when I crowned that steepest hill
and gravity conspired with speed to drag
my willing feet faster downward—such pure
exhilaration! such scattering of self
and pouring in of nature: each leaf
so separate, so much itself and still
belonging to its tree, undifferentiated
singularity!
O, Blake, to feel that,
feel at one as leaf to tree, tree to hill,
shedding and receiving heat, sharing light,
mindful of the whole not just the part. Soul
not purified from body, no, but knit
as pulse and artery, the liquid flow of fire.

Fire in the Trees

My son cries from the bedroom, "Daddy!
Daddy! Fire in the woods!" And now, the leaves gone
dry in their brightness, I fear any fire
will pour fast as run-off in spring across
the single dry lawn intervening, so I
run, stumbling over the frantic boy,
to the window, finding only the sumac
ruddy in twilight. "It's just the trees,"
I assure him, "their leaves turning color.
That happens in autumn. You're just too young
to remember."
"Fire! Daddy," he corrects me,
"fire in the trees!" I concede to the moment
and bundle him up; only a walk
through the woods will convince him, only touching
the leaves, feeling the absence of heat, will make clear
the simple process of autumn. I press his hand

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to the flame-colored leaf. "See," I would tell him,
"just color."
But now I feel the warmth
of his hand; so much heat for its smallness in mine,
I imagine I must feel through his hand
the tree's heat of conversion, each leaf's small flame
yielding essence to air. I should have remembered
the slow fire at the metaphor's root.

The Simple Truth about Snow

The snow came down in "sheets" we used to say,
watching from the parlor flakes "blanketing"
the street, smoothing over curb and sidewalk,
making shrubs and hedges disappear
under drifts. I marveled how the streetlamp,
a few feet from the window where I stood,
blurred and dimmed like headlights through a haze.

All those years ago I knew, and know again,
watching snowflakes settle like particles
in wine, ashes drifting down through air, or
—damn!
Twenty-seven years I've lived with snow
and still I can't discuss the stuff without
comparing it to bedding, sediment,
or ash; next thing I'll call it powdered milk
or say it "sifts like flour" to the ground.

I've eaten it, rolled in it, in high school
I played football in the midst of it,
shoveled it from sidewalks, roofs, and driveways
more occasions than my backbone cares
to calculate. Christ, it seems I can't live
clear of it.
One night, years ago, I drove
twenty miles through snow so thick, I swear, I

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couldn't find the road. Guardrails, phonelines, trees
all lost, tire tracks drifted over, nothing
in my lights to tell the road: just snow, whirling
white, each separate flake lancing through my eyes,
blinding white, as white as milk, as light, as
white as God.
All emptiness around me,
so far from lights and shelter, the car might
plummet off the road, tumble through a field
and leave me stranded, frozen in my seat
till spring.
Like Saul, like Saul struck blind, I prayed
the white might lift like wings, like scales, I begged
forgiveness, swore I'd consecrate my life—
O Christ, O Lord, O God I couldn't find
a name for—how I prayed, each flake, every
blinding inch until the driveway.
That house
was no Damascus, and my conversion
didn't last beyond the few stiff shots it took
to calm me. What god holds a desperate soul
to panicked vows? I keep them to myself,
even late at parties when I trot the story
of the blizzard out—recount them only those nights
when something in the way headlights dazzle
through the heavy flakes reminds me. My eyes
open wider then than simile can tell.

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WILLIAM HATHAWAY

The Secretsharer

The long hours Gilbert spent alone driving in his roomy Oldsmobile station wagon was what he really enjoyed the most about his job as a land-leasing agent for an oil company. He felt at complete peace in that solitude, meditating, hermetically-sealed in his own weather, some husky croon kneading his tired heart from fore and aft speakers. Drinking in the monk's cell motel rooms, redolent with Pine-Sol and mildew, he got maudlin lonely, homesick for his wife, Mary, and his girls, watching the grainy and inconstant TV picture. But his sadness on the interstate was noble and serene. Two fingers on the wheel, power steering glided the Custom Cruiser over rolling terrain, around sweeping curves edged with pine or craggy cliff-face, and on cruise control the forests, pastureland, farmhouses, one-street hamlets and all the rustic shacks swept by, one after another.

But on this evening's drive across the city, Gilbert cursed the other drivers instead of enjoying the pleasant game of weaving for position. As he slid onto the exit loop off the elevated fourlane, he saw his knuckles white on the steering wheel and he thought it wouldn't hurt to have a little relaxer before going to the school meeting Mary had shoved off on him. It was at one of the parents' houses and he just didn't want to go. He knew he was being petulant, but it stood to reason that people who would have school meetings in their homes would be officious and obnoxiously civic. Besides, Gilbert didn't much like going to strange houses. He liked the detective work of searching out titles in the parish courthouses, but not the actual sales work of leasing. He was basically shy and loathed every door he approached.

He had been looking forward to an evening of ruminative drinking, always beer at home, in his private study. Mary and the girls called it "the bear's den," where he listened to his favorite old records with the headphones on, like *Silver Dag-*

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ger by Joan Baez or *Rubber Soul* by the Beatles, and wrote poetry. Sometimes they were like poems, but often sort of philosophical thoughts. "Impressions" maybe. Thoughts he had about feelings he had; thoughts that mattered. He showed his writing to Mary sometimes and she told him he was a talented writer.

"You ought to write stories," she told him. "You could sell them to magazines."

Mary was an office manager in a department store and she was a very practical and reliable person. Gilbert was terribly proud of her, how efficient she was and how neat and beautiful she looked every morning in her business suits. She meant to be encouraging, but she didn't understand this side of him that was private. She was really smart and kind, but she couldn't understand the point of thinking just to be thinking. When she'd told him he had to go because it was her aerobics night, he'd put on a sour face and she had spoken sharply to him. "Listen, I go to all the damn PTA meetings and sit through all the prayers and hoopla. It's not going to kill you to do one little thing for your daughters."

He didn't care if she went to the damn PTA or not. How come he had to suffer for *her* guilt? But he didn't say anything. It just wasn't worth the fuss.

The exit ramp curled down into a quiet neighborhood, streets laid out in grids and named after fruit trees. Gilbert let the station wagon creep up to a pause at each corner; its bright red reflection flashed in every black windowpane he slipped by. He found the right street and then the number, a one-story orange stucco with twin camellias flanking the door. Though cars were already parked in front, Gilbert floated on past, and on the next empty block he turned the key off before a dark-paned house. He crawled over two seats, unlocked the well compartment and rummaged a pint of Taaka vodka out from under rusty tools, old spark plugs and crumpled sheets of car manual.

Gilbert leaned back into the crimson upholstery of the back seat and sloshed down a healthy gulp that drifted into his stomach as a warm ball, diffusing on impact like a rose blossoming in slow motion. Almost simultaneously his attitude improved. The back seat felt cozy like his study and he could feel his neck muscles relaxing.

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This couldn't be too bad; the people might even be something to write about. Just stay detached, he told himself. He bubbled the pint once more, capped it and locked it away. That was his limit on that stuff. Gilbert had rules for himself. At home, he only drank beer in his study and he only let himself get skunked when Mary and the girls were asleep. Drinking was for his study time. It helped him think, but he never mixed it up with business. People who drank around others were the ones who developed problems. Back in the driver's seat, he misted his mouth with breath spray from the glove compartment and popped a Clorets. He felt chipper now; no experience could be a total waste.

A tall, gaunt woman who called herself Doris answered the doorbell. The skin of her face was gray to bruise-purple, depending on how light hit the peaks and hollows. Her eyes glistened from deep-set and black-ringed sockets as if they had witnessed unspeakable and unforgettable horrors, perhaps from the darkness behind them. The woman looked crazy, and Gilbert's heart sank.

"Hi, my name's Gilbert, Marta and Nanny's father," Gilbert said bravely. "It's really good of you to open your home like this."

"Oh no, I'm your program director for this evening," Doris said. Her voice was clear and brittle as an old teacher's and Gilbert realized that she must have come from the North somewhere. Bright red lipstick slashed her lips, making her mouth look like a fresh cut. "*This* is your hostess, Phyllis Burtts."

And sure enough, behind tall Doris in the vestibule was a very white and delicate little woman who looked like a beautiful doll that had been turned human to grow up into a woman and a mommy. Her husband, Les, was a huge bald man with rough curly hair poking out of his shirt and matting the backs of his hands, and Gilbert winced over his set grin from Les's terrific handshake.

In a thickly carpeted and overheated living room, two other couples were sunk into right-angle sofas and one other short, stocky man was seated at attention on a straight-backed dining room chair. A fat, yellow cat had just waded through the beige shag carpet prompting a brief interchange about pets, but only the click of the pendulum in an imitation an-

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tique clock between two ceramic mallards broke the formal silence when Gilbert entered. Les introduced Gilbert to everyone as Gil, a name which only a gym teacher had called him long ago.

There was a young woman called Betsy who seemed too softly girlish, cute and blonde, to have any kids in school. Her husband, John, had red and weathered skin on his face and hands from working construction. He looked very tired. As they sat waiting the other married man, named Bill, asked John what he did. John told him the name of the construction company where he was a foreman and it turned out they knew people in common because Bill owned a well-known bar in town and knew all kinds of people. Bill's wife, Sharon, was also big-boned and heavy, but her complexion was soft and pasty looking. It didn't look like very many parents for a big school meeting.

Gilbert felt awkward and he looked over to the other single fellow for relief. Utterly impassive with folded arms, the man's solid stockiness, so straight and quiet in the dining room chair like a Buddha, made Gilbert think that this fellow was serene far beyond any mundane social awkwardness.

"Glad to see I'm not the only one flying solo tonight," Gilbert said through his stiff smile. "I'm Gilbert."

"Les introduced us less than two minutes ago, Gilbert, and my name is still Harold." Harold's face stayed completely blank. He had fat lips, both sensuous and arrogant, and his color was an oily yellow-brown. In the instant of confused embarrassment, a sudden, breathtaking blow hit his lap, followed by stabbing pain.

"Jesus Christ!" He screamed. The room was immediately silent, looming with open-mouthed hostile faces. Doris stood frozen in mid-room holding a full punch bowl, her face black as a prune and behind her, clinging to a platter of oatmeal cookies, stood Phyllis looking like she might cry.

"Oh, you naughty kitty," Phyllis squealed like a little girl playing mommy. Gilbert blushed so hard he thought the ends of his ears must be sweating as he automatically unhooked the cat's claws from his corduroys and leg, murmuring apologies to the nervous relief of the company. Gilbert's outburst acted as an icebreaker and everyone was getting comfortably

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chatty over the punch and cookies when Doris started clapping her hands from the middle of the floor.

"Attention people, attention please," she called out in her classroom voice, as if over a dinning throng. "As I'm sure you already know, these Interaction Meetings are organized all over our city through the public schools to foster improved community communication and transcultural conceptual sharing skills. Thank you for coming tonight. I'm only sorry so many who were asked could not find the time to share our evening." Doris' genuinely pained eyes lingered for a second on the enormous bowl of rusty–colored punch. It tasted awful, like some kind of boiled fruit and wax, Gilbert thought. There was a clove floating on top of his cup. The oatmeal cookies, however, were moist and delicious.

Gilbert knew for sure now that something was really screwy. The fuzzy, blue ditto slip, which he had promptly mislaid after Mary handed it to him, had simply said "a parents' meeting."

"Using some very important methods from T.A., we are going to begin to open ourselves just a little to each other tonight and I hope we will be opening up new awarenesses about ourselves to ourselves. That will be our ultimate, personal goal: learning the true power of that most important person: ourself!" At the end of this speech, Doris' face suddenly split in a crimson slash and her eyes caught fire deep in their sockets. It took Gilbert a full second to realize Doris was grinning. It was hideous, like in the horror movie when they break open the coffin and there is the death's head with its lips shrunk back in nasty humor. Maybe he would write an Edgar Allan Poe-type poem about Doris.

Doris explained the evening schedule. They would listen to a short cassette tape by some famous doctor who would explain about Transactional tools and other authentic techniques. Then they would write out some answers to some "Self-Awareness Probes" and analyze the results in an interaction session. Then they would break down into smaller "Feedback Workshops" for more interaction, culminating in an "Intimacy Confrontation." Doris was about to punch the cassette starter when Bill, the bar owner, interrupted her, rasping through his moustache and beard.

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"Say, excuse me Doris, but is this tape here from that Amway outfit?" Everyone shuffled deeper or straighter into the overstuffed chairs.

"Oh no," said Doris in hasty reassurance, but Gilbert could hear the acid below the sugar. "This is an absolutely non-commercial community program."

"Well, I sure don't have any bone to pick, but just to clear up something for my own info, what does all this really fine stuff got to do with the kids' school?" Bill was bent far forward now and his head was cocked like Mike Wallace on "60 Minutes."

At this point, Les, a lawyer and their host, cleared his throat and came to Doris' defense. His voice was measured with even civility. "This is not an official school function, Bill, but Phyllis and I thought it would be a first-class way to get us parents together to open lines of communication. And you know, Bill, that's *got* to benefit our kids."

Doris stood glowering by her little tape recorder, looking gray and injured. Her wing-like shoulders were hunched inside her brown suitcoat and she just let Les talk for her.

"Sure, it all sounds great, Les," Bill was saying in the bluff heartiness of conciliation. "I just like to know who's doing the pitching."

"Of course you do, Bill, that was a perfectly reasonable question. You're right in the swing of what we're here for. Honesty!"

Doris had punched the button and a voice even more nasal and Yankee than hers was listing various ego-states people were supposed to have. A very wise poet once said that all the world's a stage and it's human nature to play a lot of roles, or "games." When we're little we've already started to write out our own scripts. It all seemed really easy to understand and plausible and it reminded Gilbert of *A Christmas Carol* by Dickens, the old version with Charles Laughton.

The voice said parents burdened children with all sorts of guilt-garbage that messed up scripts, so adults were still programmed to stay kids and there were some good games to play that taught people how to get in touch with being really honest adults. The most important person to love is yourself; all great achievers have first learned how to love themselves.

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Shouldn't we be honest with those we love, the voice asked? Gilbert was thinking about love; if any others felt love like he did. It was a lonely thing, the love he felt when he meditated alone, but also a very special quality.

Getting sharp pencils and paper for everyone was a lot of fuss, but finally Doris started reading questions. Many of the questions were pretty crazy, and there was a lot of giggling as everyone got loose. Gilbert did learn things about the others from their answers. When Doris asked who they thought was the greatest living American, John said Billy Graham and his wife, Betsy, said Jerry Lewis because of his wonderful work for the crippled kids. Bill said Lee Iacocca. Gilbert thought Harold's answer, "all the people who invented the computer," was smart and he began to decide that Harold was peculiar, but not really disagreeable. From the intellectual way Harold talked, a very precise and measured yet surprisingly high voice, Gilbert figured he might be some kind of teacher over at the college.

When Gilbert answered by saying that after Jack Kennedy got killed he couldn't think of any real heroes, Les said, "Hey come on, Gil, you got to play the game. We all came up with someone, Fella."

But then Doris said, "Sometimes we're honestly undecided. Maybe Gil has started to see an undeveloped part of himself?" She looked at Gilbert's face for a long, gloomy moment.

Some of the flakier questions were: "What does pink taste like?" (Gilbert's answer was cotton candy). "What does your favorite song do to your body?" (tingles). "If your pet could talk, what would it say to you?" (I'm hungry, a lie since the girls' hamster was long dead).

One question, "If you were a flower, what kind would you be?" got Bill into a tiff with his wife. When Bill said he'd be an anenome, Sharon punched him in the arm and said, "That isn't a flower, Dummy."

Bill's face turned darker red. "What the hell do you mean?"

"An anenome is an animal, Silly. All the time we've spent in the Keys, you should know that!"

"The hell it is," Bill rasped, incredulous. "It don't look like any animal I've seen!"

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Then Harold broke in, as if reading from a textbook, "An *anemone* is an animal and there is another species which is a plant."

Bill grinned at his wife. "That flower one's the one I meant."

"The hell you did. I saw you watching that Jack Cousteau show last night." Sharon's cheeks were shaking. Gilbert suddenly got an idea to smooth things over, the way Harold had tried to do.

"I got into a thing with my wife like that," he spoke up. "Over praying mantises. You know, whether it's spelled like prayer," he held his hands up before him as if praying, "or like preying on other creatures." For the latter, he raised his arms and made claws of his hands, the way the hunting mantis looks. For a second or two, they just stared at him and then Sharon's guffaw started them all laughing.

"You're quite a character, Gil," Les said, as if talking to a cute child, shaking his head with tolerant amusement. Even Doris' face was twisted in ghastly mirth. The game had gotten old and soon she broke them up into "transaction groups" to try out some "new modes of interaction."

Though Gilbert had felt a little annoyed with Les, he somehow felt like he'd contributed something. Even if some of them were jerks, they were basically friendly and they seemed to be winging it just like him.

Gilbert's group, or "feedback workshop," included Les, Betsy and Harold. They sat, as instructed, in a close circle on the carpet in one corner of the room and this coziness momentarily made them all slightly tense again. Betsy tittered a lot about being the only female and Les played into it by helping her get seated on the floor and cracking jokes about how they'd have to "watch their cussing." Harold managed to sit as straight and as chunkily on the floor as he had in his chair, while Gilbert leaned back on his hands, enjoying the velvety shag between his fingers. They were supposed to share honestly what the most important thing in their lives was, where and when they felt most serene, how they thought others saw them, and what they thought was their worst fault.

It didn't seem to help them loosen up again when Betsy started off by sharing that the most important thing to her and John was their personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

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Somehow this embarrassed Gilbert, but he kept up a firm smile.

"I guess our church activities are pretty important to me and Phyllis, too," Les started in a low, serious voice, "but by golly, God is so big and He's into just about everything. I'd have to say our social commitments *through* the church, like sponsoring a starving child in Bolivia, mean the most to us." Gilbert thought that Les must be a good lawyer. Betsy was looking at Les with moist eyes, her face a beautiful pink.

"Of course, the *first* order is getting right with Jesus," Les said, smiling at Betsy. She beamed back at him. Gilbert looked at them looking at each other and grinned uncomfortably. He was next.

"I think my family, Mary and my two little girls, are most important, and doing things with them." Immediately he felt his face flush. Not only was that a banal cop-out, but he knew as he said it that the last part wasn't even true. He did passionately love his little family, but how could he explain to *these* people that he loved them from other rooms, other towns even? What he really liked to do, where he really felt "OK," was just to think quietly. Of all these others, he thought only Harold, who seemed a little too strange, might understand this thought. He really loved Mary, but she couldn't grasp what he meant with his writing.

Les leaned forward and looked with composed concern into Gilbert's red face. "I hear you, Gil, and I think your commitment to your family is really neat. I just wonder why you started out with those words, 'I think.' " Les leaned back again, still staring at Gilbert with pensive compassion.

"Oh I know it's true," Gilbert said hastily. "That's just a way of talking."

"I wonder," said Les. "I'd think about that, Gil." Gilbert felt indigestible shame in the bottom of his stomach and he also thought he might hate Les.

Harold was saying that the most important thing to him was the truth. He said the word like it had a capital tee, The Truth. His deliberate, high voice was almost a song, or a chant, and he wet his big lips often and blinked.

"I've had quite a difficult year, or so," he paused for several seconds to wink at the carpet, "and it has led me to deeply examine my own nature in search of Truth." Harold would

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not elaborate on that. Gilbert was pretty sure Harold worked over at the college. He could see from Les's expression that Les thought Harold too odd a duck even to bother confronting.

Les and Betsy were congratulating each other on the quality of their "alone moments" and how they'd learned how to be nice to themselves. It all seemed superficial to Gilbert, but he felt that his own phoniness had contributed to the general hypocrisy and he wanted to make amends.

When they moved on to how they thought others saw them and what their big faults were, Gilbert felt a small jolt of adrenalin speed his blood. He could try out a second chance with this topic. Betsy was saying her pet peeve was John driving her car in his filthy work clothes.

"After all, he has his own yukky truck to drive and we need *one* good car. But I have such a *really* bad *thing* about it; I must come across as the most *awful* witch!" She trilled like a jungle bird.

"Temper." Les threw up the word like a ball, shook his big shiny head sagely at the carpet and smiled ruefully, collecting his wisdom. "You're telling my story. I can't tell you what I've done to some putting irons."

While Betsy was cackling, Gilbert felt his impatience for his turn to come turn bitter. They weren't playing the game seriously, just flirting and monkeyshines going on. "And you know," Les was saying solemnly, "all that anger just makes me look like a jerk." Then they looked over to Gilbert.

"Well," he said looking hard at his hands. His mouth was dry and his voice sounded small. "I guess my biggest fault or problem is that I may be an alcoholic." There was a gratifying, yet scary stillness. He looked up at Harold, who stared back with parted lips. "Of course, I don't have any real problems with it yet, but," he let his face get very sober, "I'm afraid I *could* become an alcoholic. For instance, I had a drink in the car before coming in here."

"So many terrible drinkers have been reformed through the power of prayer," Betsy finally said. Gilbert noticed that her lower lip was quivering. She was scared, he realized. She might be sort of shallow, a giddy cupcake, but she didn't babble all that God-stuff because it was easy to say. Betsy was sincere, not righteous, and *because* she was so silly the depth of

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her belief made Gilbert ashamed of his own ceaseless thinking. "It really works. If you let the Lord come into *all* your life, He will remove that sin."

"That was really gut-level sharing, Gil, and I know you feel better getting that out in the open." Doris had crept up behind them and was crouching right behind Gilbert. Actually, he felt like a sucker. What he had just divined about Betsy confused him, and Harold, who he had thought might understand and respond, just stared at him pokerfaced while the turn of Les's mouth was clear disgust. Doris had come to break them up for their one-on-one intimacy-interaction encounter, but Gilbert felt near the end of his evening. As Les hoisted himself up off the floor, he paused to lean over into Gilbert's face.

"That was really something, Gil. Yessir, definitely something." He shook his head with calm pity, but the tone was caustic. Gilbert blushed in anguish. Before he could muster the nerve to leave the house, Harold settled heavily on the carpet in front of him. Gilbert felt trapped; around the room the others were pairing off into corners and he had clearly sat there steaming too long.

"Well, Gilbert, do you wish to speak first, or shall I?"

"Actually, I don't feel like saying anything more right now. I'm out of the swing of all this." He steeled himself for the inevitable righteous disclaimer and upbeat testimonial to good will. He wasn't going to take any more pollyanna piety without barking back this time.

"Under the circumstances, your attitude is rather understandable." Harold gazed and winked straight into his eyes, a fat placid Buddha. "These are pleasant enough people, but quite unrealized emotionally."

"I'm really glad you said that. To tell you the truth, I was about to bug out of here." And Gilbert did feel a vast relief. Harold was a kook, but a really fine kook after all and they could just wing this "intimacy" thing.

"I'm very glad you didn't. I am so impressed with the quality of your candor and conviction, I have made a decision to confide an extremely important matter to you. I hope that through confidential discussion I might find some therapeutic solace. I specifically asked the woman, Doris, to make us partners." Gilbert's rosy flush was not from anger or embar-

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rassment this time, but pleasure. The heavy man's high and precise voice sweetened the golden lamplight and he felt deeply flattered. Then Harold leaned forward and whispered urgently.

"I killed a jogger."

Between winks, Harold stared fixedly into Gilbert's eyes which felt glued wide open. "Excuse me?" His voice sounded far away.

"I killed a jogger, a woman. Eight months ago. My wife had just left me and taken my little boy; I was extremely upset, apparently irrational. Driving home by the park, she was suddenly in my headlights, jogging away from me, back turned, the way they always are, you know?" Gilbert felt himself nodding.

"I moved the wheel just a fraction and though the impact made an incredibly loud thump, there was only the slightest dent on the chrome rimming the light." Harold paused and shut both lips and eyelids tightly. "I drove right on home."

"That's really awful," Gilbert's mouth was sticky so the words seemed stuck to each other.

Harold opened his eyes and for an instant they were mournful behind the thick glass. "It was the worst thing that ever happened to me, Gilbert." The high voice was momentarily querulous and childlike, but quickly steadied. "I heard she was dead the next day. It was on television, but I would not watch; I believe those news pictures are disgraceful." His fat lips pursed firmly.

"Did you call the police?"

"My God, no!" Harold rocked back on fat haunches and then lowered his voice again. Everyone looked over at Gilbert. "I could never go to prison, Gilbert. It would kill me."

Harold's eyes narrowed and his voice became very careful. "If confronted, I would deny everything, absolutely. As I am sure you must realize, nothing could be proven." His hands were fists on his plump thighs.

"I just don't know what to say; I'm really confused." Gilbert felt like lying down on the rug.

"It would be as serious a crime to imprison me, since I am not fundamentally a criminal. You see, it has already happened and *I* am now the one who is suffering."

Gilbert was so tired. Somehow, by telling this terrible thing

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to him, Harold seemed to grow stronger, his high voice more childishly confident, irrefutable, and his body became even more massive. "I need to talk to you. Not here," the relentless voice was saying. "I need to discuss what is happening to me with you at length. I feel so much better already."

At that moment, to Gilbert's tremendous relief, Doris clapped her hands to end the last session. As the others were arising and unstiffening with much hilarity, Gilbert staggered to his feet and scurried for the kitchen, lifting a vague hand at Harold that could mean "in a second," but meant with all Gilbert's heart "farewell forever." He felt like a target was painted on the small of his back.

Doris was carrying the big punch bowl and Gilbert took it from her. "Why thank you, Gil, how kind."

"Can I talk with you for a minute?" He kept his voice as low as possible, but he could feel Harold watching.

In the quiet and smokeless air of the kitchen, Doris bent her gloomy head toward Gilbert for a professional listen. Gilbert took a deep breath.

"This fellow, Harold. He's just confessed a murder to me." Doris' face zoomed from gray to purple and her boney frame snapped to attention.

"Don't tell me another thing, Gil. The whole point of our interaction was to extend *complete* trust. For your *own* growth you shouldn't have broken confidentiality." Her head quivered with indignation, framed by the green chalkboard on the freezer.

"This seemed like a pretty special case to me."

"Then everyone would have a special case, wouldn't they? Nothing would be sacred, right? Listen, I don't want you to think about Harold; I want you to think about Gil. Why is Gil making Harold's problem Gil's? What *I'm* hearing is Gil having a real struggle with being judgmental. How can you ever love and help Harold if you're always judging him by your own standards . . .?" Phyllis came into the kitchen with a clatter of punch cups and Gilbert stalked out in an enraged fog, right into Harold's moist gaze, winking slow winks.

Did those eyes say "My only friend" or "Judas"? Either one was intolerable. He felt like thick, oily arms were smothering him in a sweat-slime embrace. Gilbert was gripped by a sudden, fierce terror. He *had* to tell someone; get someone to

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help him. Desperate, he weaved across the room to where Les and John were standing and interrupted a joke Les was telling.

"Listen please, I really need to talk to you all, outside please?"

It was very chilly outside on the sidewalk and the men hugged their arms in shirtsleeves and blew steam into the dark.

"What the hell is this all about, Gil?" Les's voice was not kind.

"During that intimacy thing back there, that guy, Harold, told me he'd killed some lady." Gilbert heard his words quaking but he kept smiling.

"OK Fella," Les's lawyer voice went off-the-record, decisive and crude, "you've played your little games with us all night. You think I haven't been watching you sneer at everybody and everything in my house? When you started that sob-sister crap about your drinking, getting that little girl so upset she almost bawled, I almost wiped that smirk off your face for you. You got some kind of problem? Get professional help, pal. Go to your goddam minister."

Gilbert's grin had hardened onto his face. He didn't hate Les anymore, because doomed people have no time to hate. John's tired face bent over to Gilbert and he spoke in the confidential tone of the "good cop."

"Call the police, man. I'd call the law if I was you." Then he followed Les down the walk, back into the golden light.

As he grabbed his coat in the vestibule, Gilbert could see that Harold was already wearing his, saying goodbye to Phyllis. Without a word to anyone, Gilbert dashed out to his station wagon and peeled out like a teenager. Shortly before he reached the interstate entrance ramp, as if in a nightmare, two white headlights, bordered by little red eyes, pulled up to his bumper and stayed there, glaring in his mirror. As they nosed behind him on the nearly empty fourlane, Gilbert lapsed into paranoid despair. Even as Harold had been making his confession, Gilbert had thought about the police, but he absolutely believed what Harold told him. Nothing could be proved; the police would do nothing. Except let Harold know he'd squealed. And then what might that weirdo do to Mary, to Marta and Nanny?

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The car clock, a green undersea glow, said after eleven and he thought of Mary and the girls, home in innocent sleep, oblivious to the horror he was bringing into their lives. God, how he loved them. But where else *could* he go? If he could just get out of this mess, he would *absolutely* spend the time he'd lied about with his little family. It was a sacred vow. Oh, why had he shot his fat mouth off to be a big "honest" man? He couldn't do anything right; he was a complete fake. He didn't know why he even bothered to talk to himself. There was nothing to do but just go down the road in his beloved automobile, a dumb hunk of junk he'd drooled all over as if it had a soul.

Just when Gilbert was about to jam on his brakes so those vicious headlights would hurtle into his back-end, the lights were gone. All was serene darkness and the wonderful growl of his own steady engine. The great sigh he unstopped as the full relief settled into him seemed to reduce his body by one third. Obviously his own sick mind had made up a pursuer and he'd just made a fool of himself to himself. In fact he'd doubtlessly overreacted to some pathetic, harmless nut who was looking for attention, looking for someone to take him seriously. What he really needed was a drink, a stiff one. He'd served some heavy duty. What was the big deal, anyway? He'd tried to be responsible and the grim fact was that there was nothing more he could do. The world was full of sad and terrible things and all he could do was try to live up to that promise he'd made on the edge of his frenzy. Yes, at least one very good thing had come out of the evening, he decided. The next time he drove on a long trip, he'd put his mind to thinking up some family activities.

The house was dark as he cruised up into the carport. The whole neighborhood was in peaceful slumber, glimmering with porch lights and Mary and the girls were safe inside. The first hit of vodka bombed so nicely in his stomach, he burned his throat on a long second pull. He gave himself a third, in recompense for his ordeal. It occurred to him that there was plenty of cold beer inside and no real need to get to work early in the morning. As he was getting out of the car, thinking about whether he might write in his study, about this bizarre evening, he heard the phone begin to ring inside the house.

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ARTHUR GREGOR

In Dark's Cover

1

Almost wherever I look in this tree-rimmed
wide river's valley there are reflections,
in canals, those no longer in use covered with
the foliage's bright green refuse, lacelike
offshoots frail as breath, in others
still trafficked by coal-bearing barges black as
their cargo, or by pleasure craft trimmed
with flags, strung-up wash, open beach umbrellas.
There are as well slender streams not deep
but rushing with strength between the fields
they nourish. Cattle come there to drink,
for a long time standing in groups in the
deep shade of trees, enormous whether they
be linden, birches, willows, chestnut, acacias;
no matter which, the darkness they form is
the same, the patches of dark in the water
where the heads of the cattle are mirrored
and where spears of light through the branches
sparkle in the shimmering surface, the same.
Then there are amidst a variety of evergreens
like other trees here grown to great heights
due to a favored condition of water and light,
and around the stone foundations of once
great homes, still ponds, moat-like, with narrow,
by now barely passable bridges, where float
water-lilies, shiny green leaves and other
flora that flourish in still, dark water.
An occasional magpie or wild duck
fluttering up, skimming the surface in some
pursuit, disturb the serenity, or add a

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characteristic sound to the stillness
lingering across the ponds like the mist in
the early hours of the day. The feeling around
the ponds is grotto-like, an underwater world
of varying shades of green, creepers wound around
mossy treetrunks, flutterings from often invisible doves
high in the branches like bats in the depth of domes,
chirpings, twitterings sounding from the grotto
stillness, the watery darkness. Whose trills
from where? Whose the branches? the dark, the stillness,
the blotches in the water having wiped away
distinctions, colorations, gendre, species . . .

2

I wake from a dream, drenched by the dark's immense
cover wherein, waterlike, appearances, events
are altered, the sameness behind a striving,
an urging toward unalterable essence glimmers
like the light the water captures and transmutes
regardless of the sky's mutedness or brightness
into the soul-soothing glow of sameness, of oneness.
A murmur, a rippling ongoingness,
the presence that remains unseen, unperceived,
is not of the nature of diversity, nor of
competitiveness or conflict, has captured me.
No recognizable shapes, nor sounds; only
the dark's soothing infused without sensation.
And the wonder, deep wonder of recognition,
comprehension. I had understood in the dream
that there where I was it was missing;
that violence ruled in its place; that I must
escape dislocation, must make my way back
to where the visage rests, where welcome
remains unchanged. In the fear-ridden street
someone I knew approached me and as though
he had read my thoughts, said: "We are not
separated there. Only here, where going one's own way

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is assumed to be the only good, only here
are we enmeshed in turmoil, separateness."
And putting his arm around my shoulder made
me feel that I was once again embraced
as perhaps I had only been in someone's heart.
And thus flowed we on into the dream's immense
cover, the watery darkness covering sightless
indivisible light. I wake. Outside, the great
dark trees stand silent, ancient, unmoved
as time. Of their reflections in the stream
that enters the wide river down below not far
from where I've slept, their trunks, branches,
leaves, lacelike blossoms on the frailest stems;—
of all that makes them trees, nor of the sky,
dark sky between the leaves, nothing can be
discerned in the water as though the dark,
abolishing distinctions, had blinded it.

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WENDELL BERRY

The Record

My old friend tells us how the country changed:
where the grist mill was on Cane Run,
now gone; where the peach orchard was,
gone too; where the Springport Road was, gone
beneath returning trees; how the creek ran three weeks
after a good rain, long ago, no more;
how when these hillsides first were plowed, the soil
was black and deep, no stones, and that was long ago;
where the wild turkeys roosted in the old days:
"You'd have to know this country mighty well
before I could tell you where."

And my young friend says: "Have him speak this
into a recorder. It is precious. It should be saved."
I know the panic of that wish to save
the vital knowledge of the old times, handed down,
for it is rising off the earth, fraying away
in the wind and the coming day.
As the machines come and the people go
the old names rise, chattering, and depart.

But knowledge of my own going into old time
tells me no. Because it must be saved,
do not tell it to a machine to save it.
That old man speaking you have heard
since your boyhood, since his prime, his voice
speaking out of lives long dead, their minds
speaking in his own, by winter fires, in fields and woods,
in barns while rain beat on the roofs
and wind shook the girders. Stay and listen
until he dies or you die, for death
is in this, and grief is in it. Live here
as one who knows these things. Stay, if you live;

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listen and answer. Listen to the next one
like him, if there is to be one. Be
the next one like him, if you must;
stay and wait. Tell your children. Tell them
to tell their children. As you depart
toward the coming light, turn back
and speak, as the creek steps downward
over the rocks, saying the same changing thing
in the same place as it goes.

When the record is made, the unchanging
word carried to a safe place
in a time not here, the assemblage
of minds dead and living, the loved lineage
dispersed, silent, turned away, the dead
dead at last, it will be too late.

A Difference

Machines pass on the road, so heavy
that the leaves of the young beech,
spreading in stillness, shake.

But on the river, slow waves
roll under quick waves,
causing the reflections of the trees
to ripple and to sway.

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CHARLES GULLANS

Winter in Minnesota

As you take off your hat, you say hello,
And kiss me briefly, while your overshoes
Are scuffed off of your feet. Your coat is slow
To find the hanger as I toe your toes,

And take your jacket and hang it up, too,
While kissing you in turn. I touch your chest,
Loosen your tie, and slip your collar through,
And then the slow unbuttoning of your vest.

Arms over shoulders as we walk beside
Each other, I still fumble with your belt,
Ruffle your hair, and feel your shirt tails ride
Over your hips, both firmly made and svelte,

And taut now with anxiety. We tremble
As we embrace. Your belt has fallen free,
While you kick off your shoes, and we resemble
Amateurs of the ancient mystery.

Your shirt, your trousers, and your shorts are next.
As you bend down to strip your socks, I see
Your dazzling width of shoulder, one dark text
I read each day with greater certainty.

Just so I read the secrets of your smile
As you stand up, erect, and, firm of grip,
Take me across the room in double file
To read the great arcana, lip to lip.

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The Most Famous Waterfall in North America

We can undress now twenty times a day
At any moment you or I might say,
"I love you and I want you." At the least
Inclining on our part, we are the beast
That loves and sorrows and returns again
Into the riven world of women, men,
To separateness, but with our memory—
Powerful and enduring all—that we
Have been together and will be once more
And once again. We have been here before
And joy in each revisit to the place
That's ours alone. I'm looking at your face
That looks at mine with a foretelling pleasure
And know I stand at the warm gates of leisure
And your arms. First, your hair comes down in coils
And falls on my bare shoulders like the spoils
Of Eden in a wilderness of awe.
Trembling, my knees obey their only law,
The mingled fear and certainty that this
Cannot be happening, that nothing else
But this is happening or ever will.
How tender your embrace, when will with will
Has merged, and our desire in one consent.
Your spidery, elusive touch is bent
On bringing me to fullness. You guide me,
Companion of this voyage undersea,
Through the dark river to the fertile lands
We never see but in our senses. Hands
Pressed to each other's hands in urgency,
Now you arrive and I arrive and we.
Bright archipelagoes for memory!

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MARCIA B. SIEGEL

Thirty Years in Eden's Dustbin

PAUL TAYLOR IS A DEDICATED ANTI-UTOPIAN. He harbors a continuing fascination for devout but unavailing rituals, for ideal states that are destined to break down; and this has given him a durable dialectic to play with: the utopian struggle between the possible and the practical. Only, Taylor sees it from inside out. His dances, even the sunniest, are shadowed with irony, thwarted by grotesque intrusions. The harmonious, witty worlds he composes can be read simultaneously as a caustic critique of society. The bleak and fractured ones celebrate a degraded form of survival. In the rare instances when he resists his native pessimism, the worlds seem unresolved, or merely saccharine.

Taylor gave a generous four-week season at City Center this spring, with twenty dances in the repertory, to mark his thirty years as an independent choreographer. The dances spanned all three decades of work, going back to one of his first, funniest, and most macabre pieces, *Three Epitaphs* (1956). It was like being able to visit a museum, returning again and again to examine a large body of work from different angles. Repertory of these dimensions is sufficiently rare in modern dance as to constitute a utopian event in itself. Perhaps only the great Graham seasons of the sixties and seventies allowed us such a concentrated exposure to one choreographer's work in live performances, and even they weren't this ambitious. The unprecedented view of Taylor's long-term development gave me some new insights into what I've always regarded as an interesting if peculiar sensibility.

Over the years I'd got used to thinking that his choreography was either dark or light; he'd make one dance of each kind per season, and both could be traced to the prototypal *Scudorama* and *Aureole* of the early 1960s. This season there was again a dark and a light premiere, *Last Look* and *Roses*, but in the larger context, they both seemed to depict societies in differing conditions of gratification or need.

Roses takes up a strain of romanticism that Taylor has been pursuing for a couple of years. Using late nineteenth-century music, he sets forth groups of beautiful lovers, impossibly beautiful and impossibly in love. In *Sunset* (1983) there was a story of sorts: young men in uniform encounter girls in white dresses. A summer evening in a park—dalliance, reverie, yearning—then, departure. The men decamp before you realize it, leaving the women caught in a

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moment of perplexity and regret as the curtain comes down. What they really yearn for, though, and regret, is not love but a romantic dream, the kind where the best partners are temporary—or maybe even imaginary.

Equinox (1983) and *Roses* are completely plotless essays on the same material—the first a choral dance for various groupings of four couples, and the more recent piece an extended variation on the pas de deux for six couples. Taylor uses conventionalized romantic gestures as a resource for formal dances, much as classical choreographers have abstracted national characteristics like the folded elbows of the Czardas or the mimed coquetry of a Spanish lady with a fan. Without the tender looks, the caressing gestures, *Roses* would be like any other Taylor duet, interesting but neutral.

After the first five couples have danced—this is all set to Wagner's Siegfried Idyll and Heinrich Bahrmann's Adagio for Clarinet and Strings—it seems their tragic longings have all been played out. Suddenly a sixth couple, dressed in radiant white, appears for the first time. This entrance instantly throws the whole dance into a different perspective, disrupting though at the same time preserving the predictability of its structure, and creating a totally different context for the identity of the couples who were already there. Whoever we may have thought they were, now we know their gathering was incomplete. Perhaps they were just waiting for the real stars to arrive. Perhaps they were conjuring up a memory or a mythic image. But after the white couple dance their own duet, they join the others, and once again an egalitarian group is established.

The couples in *Roses* could be the same community we see in *Cloven Kingdom* (1976), only in a solemn mood rather than an antic one. The women even wear similar clothes, long simple evening gowns, while the men are in informal pants and tank tops, as opposed to the white-tie-and-tails in *Cloven Kingdom*. A garden party, then, instead of a ball. It's curious that I always want to establish the kinship and the situation Taylor's dancers are engaged in. I assume quite a specific milieu even when I don't consciously look for it. Taylor's costumes subtly give us information about this. Usually the dancers dress alike, or in small variations of the same costume. But it's more than their clothes that unites them into a community.

Above all, Taylor's dance is formal, imposing order and agreement on everything the dancers do. They may wear street clothes, dance social dances, but they never behave naturalistically. When two of the quasi-military men in *Sunset* dance a duet, the homely gestures of tugging at their uniforms, plunging their hands in their pockets, are as musically timed as their leaps. In *Lost, Found and Lost* (1982), based on everyday movement material Taylor used in one of his earliest enfant-terrible concerts, he works with a mundane pose: the person stands with weight unevenly distributed, resting

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into one leg, the arms folded, shoulders and upper body slightly canted out over the supporting leg. The way people stand when they're waiting on line. First Taylor has the whole group of ten dancers standing on line, inching towards the wing as the person in front goes out—to where or what fate we must imagine. After this existential joke, he uses the pose like any other dance step available to the choreographer. It never entirely loses its everyday associations, but it acquires dramatic and rhythmic import as the dance goes along.

In *Dust* (1977) the music is Poulenc's bouncy Concert Champêtre for Harpsichord and Orchestra, but the occasion is ghoulish—a romp for the demented and the disabled. Through most of it, Susan McGuire dances with one arm wrapped around her abdomen. This undancerlike gesture eventually transfers itself to everyone else like a communicable disease, but they continue dancing in spite of the limitation. When the ensemble does such weird things collectively, they seem to be sharing some special secret knowledge. We seldom know what their doings mean, but we perceive their action to go beyond the imposed behavior of ordinary dance, into custom or even ritual.

Runes (1975), Taylor's most effective ritual dance, is a series of incantations whose purpose is never revealed to us, but whose solemn importance to the communicants is conveyed through a closed and inevitable progression of events. Something mysterious haunts these people but they keep it at bay with ceremonial enactments: the idea of magical replacement (while several people move across the space, one takes the place of another; the change is surreptitious, but right out in the open), and the idea that there are certain mandatory roles—victim, shaman, icon—and that anyone in the community may, or must, at some time take on any role.

Taylor's communities—tribes, families, cells—can be caricatures. His infrequent narrative dances twist out of shape various totems like the fairy tale (*Snow White*) or the great art scandal (*Le Sacre du Printemps*). Or the social unit can be simply a dance company performing dances—sharing a language and lore of the body. A whole series of related works beginning with *Esplanade* (1975) explores the ways of making modern dancers look virtuosic without resorting to classical ballet steps. Although this too is a sort of anti-utopia, or alternate-utopia, I find these latter works (*Airs, Arden Court, Mercuric Tidings*) rather bland, and least satisfying when they're most relaxed. Taylor's company are not dancers whose Olympian beauty or proportions catch your eye. Even the most agreeable and dancerly ones seem bred for contradiction—big, muscular, musical David Parsons doing a swift, picky sailor's hornpipe; lanky Susan McGuire pivoting slowly on a bare foot like Aurora in the Rose Adagio; or Kate Johnson, who has ballerina-calibre technique, wrenching herself apart in the enthusiastically wacky climax of *Aureole*.

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Antithesis is what makes Taylor's dance work. The utopian ideal explodes into nightmare. The men in *Cloven Kingdom* wouldn't be half so appealing if they just danced the tango instead of turning into a businesslike troupe of acrobats in tails. They wouldn't be funny if they did their tumbling act in leotards either. The typical Taylor effect confounds our expectations, exposes monster-instincts beneath housebroken manners. Those people in sleazy bathing suits half-hidden behind a cutout false proscenium in *Private Domain* appear to be average cruising beach bunnies. But their seductions are deliberate, joyless, and finally almost sinister. As their games get more complicated but no more passionate, we seem to become accomplices in some unnamed conspiracy.

The fact that Paul Taylor has a dark side makes him nearly unique in a time when dancing is all happy-talk and sentimentality. But even at the start, when there were still plenty of gloomy expressionists on the modern dance scene, his despair was graphic and unfathomable. *Scudorama* (1963) is gone, but the new *Last Look* could be its older, flashier but equally desolate cousin. In it, as in more Taylor dances than I can remember, we see a group of people going nowhere, stunted by self-hatred, unable to make contact with each other, and yet clinging to their togetherness for survival. The dance's opening and closing image, a quote from one of many devastating moments in *Scudorama*, is of a pile of bodies slowly revolving on the floor, arms and legs projecting from the mass—a funeral pyre, a life raft full of corpses.

The dance begins in darkness; only gradually do we begin to make out what this bulky object is. The stage is not a stage at all, but a space baffled with high mirrors, a space whose outer edges are too far away or too dark to see. People begin to extricate themselves from the pile. It's hard to tell who they are; some never seem to show their faces in the light. The women wear what look like satin dressing gowns in gaudy colors like orange and cerise, with rhinestone jewelry. The men wear dark green pants and buttoned-up tieless shirts to match, like parking attendants. They move around in various fits of impotence—jerking, vibrating, flinging themselves to the floor, twitching convulsively.

Parsons sags near one of the mirrors. McGuire is next to him. Without seeming to see him but drawn to him as if by smell or reflex, she performs ghastly motions of seduction, pushing her body into jutting curves, then catching herself and collapsing with a shudder. He reacts like an amoeba, with trancelike rotations of the shoulder, knee. One of the women, Linda Kent I think, is hurled as if by some outside force from one man to another. None can keep a hold on her. Kenneth Tosti runs faster and faster, tripping and falling violently, trying more and more desperately to stay upright. Christopher Gillis staggers right up to a mirror, suddenly sees himself, reels away, caroms back again.

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The Paul Taylor Dance Company in "Last Look."

Photo credit: Jack Mitchell

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The score for *Last Look*, by Donald York, sounds like a gloss on that summit of fin-de-siècle decadence, Ravel's La Valse, and as Kent frantically pokes at the reassembled body-pile, trying to burrow her way in, and finally drops onto it exhausted, society seems to have achieved an ultimate unity and disintegration.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

RACHEL BILLINGTON,* who lives in London, has written nine novels of which the latest are *Occasion of Sin* and *A Woman's Age*. Her new novel, *The Garish Day*, will be published by William Morrow & Co. Inc. in 1986.

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Author of *The Poetry of W. H. Auden*, *Dionysus and the City* and *The Levitator and Other Poems*, MONROE K. SPEARS is Moody Professor of English at Rice University.

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The books of ALLEN HOEY* include *Cedar Light, Hyms To a Tree* and *Transfigured Autumn*, a selection of translations of Georg Trakl. He teaches at Ithaca College.

WILLIAM HATHAWAY's fourth book of poems, *Fish, Flesh and Fowl* was recently released by Louisiana State University Press. He is currently a visiting associate professor at Union College in Schenectady.

Author of eight volumes of poems of which the most recent is *Embodiment And Other Poems* (Sheep Meadow Press), ARTHUR GREGOR is professor of English at Hofstra University, a post he has held since 1974. He spends his summers in a small town in the Loire Valley.

(*continued on page 472*)

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VERNON YOUNG

Movie Within a Movie

IT SEEMS ODD WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT IT that although sixty years have passed since the appearance of Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, in which the *dramatis personae* repudiate their roles and attempt to explain the reality of their situation as *they* see it, no filmmaker before Woody Allen has availed himself of the same predicament as expressed by characters in a movie. That Pirandello was the source of Allen's inspiration is unlikely. An ego in rebellion against the role assigned to it—which is partially the subject of *The Purple Rose of Cairo*—is more probably the consequence of Allen's apparently unending transaction with psychoanalysis, and the principal clue to this predicament is the statement, no doubt written by Allen himself, with which the biographical note to *Side Effects* (1980) concludes. "His one regret in life is that he is not someone else."

Browsing through the brief and, in my opinion, desperately unfunny pages of this book, one is startled at how often Allen resorts to mistaken or transferred identity as an automatic source of the comic

> Four weeks later I awoke in a hospital reasonably O.K. except for a few bruises and the firm conviction that I was Igor Stravinsky.

Or this:

> Paris. Wet pavements. . . . I come upon a man at an out-door cafe. It is André Malraux. Oddly, he thinks that I am André Malraux. I explain that he is Malraux and I am just a student. He is relieved to hear this, as he is fond of Mme. Malraux and would hate to think she is my wife.

How many changes can you ring on this? In *The Kugelmass Episode*, he gets closer to the metaphysics (let's loosely call it) of *The Purple Rose*. An unhappy "professor of humanities at City College" is projected by a magician into the pages of *Madame Bovary* and becomes her lover before she meets Rodolphe. His presence in the novel creates a considerable stir across the country. Students ask their profs: "Who is this character on page 100? A bald Jew is kissing Madame Bovary." Subsequently, Kugelmass abducts Emma from the early

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chapters of the novel in order to show her the big-time life of twentieth-century Manhattan. "I cannot get my mind around this," exclaims a Stanford professor. "First a strange character named Kugelmass and now *she's* gone from the book. Well, I guess the mark of a classic is that you can reread it a thousand times and always find something new." When you consider the possibilities Allen has initiated with this fantasy, his handling of it seems pretty feeble. Feeling no obligation to explore their potentialities beyond the facile one-liner, he has tossed off dozens of these glib anecdotes for an easily satisfied audience, unaware that he is chasing his own tail. I have seldom read a more embarrassing effort to sustain wit than those he revealed in *Side Effects*. This was Allen at his worst: a pseudo-sophisticate jeering at the sophisticated. The stuff is anti-intellectual, it is claustrophobic, it is above all masochistic, which is nearly always the last resort of the solipsist paling before his own image. It surprises me that anyone should have believed these sketches to have been about anything or anybody except Allen himself, alone on a raft in the East Fifties of Manhattan.

Movie-making, from time to time, has been Allen's salvation. In a film script he has been forced to embody other people, subordinate his one-liners to something which can be called substantial dialogue, and to conceive a setting which is not bordered by Fourteenth Street and the Plaza Hotel. He may never again achieve the balance he beautifully managed in *Zelig*, with his selective reconstruction of the Silent-Movie era, but in *The Purple Rose of Cairo* he comes near to it and by a similar basic strategy. He returns to the thirties when, as a necessary premise for his fairy tale, the Depression supplies him with the assumptions of economic inequality he needs to underpin his subject: his double subject, since the film is about *two* personalities who wish they were someone else.

Cecelia is a suppressed housewife, lower middle class, working as a waitress to support herself and her hulking layabout husband. Her life otherwise is the dream world of the movies, preferably those in which the characters are rich, glamorous and articulate. (Not that people now don't live the vicarious life, but today's consumer society offers them an abundance of daydream outlets and the contemporary Hollywood film infrequently depicts an idle upper crust.) Tom Baxter is a character in one such movie, "The Purple Rose of Cairo," in which he wears a pith helmet, having lately returned from Egypt as the guest of a well-to-do clique in Manhattan. He yearns to leave the screen and become part of the "reality" he glimpses from the corner of his eye and from which, by reason of his occupation, he has been debarred. So, one evening, in midperformance, he suddenly focuses his attention on the spellbound Cecelia who, he has noted, is seeing this boring movie for the fifth time, steps down into the cinema audience and dragging his admirer with him vanishes into the night.

After that, whatever happens will have to obey a certain logic within the lovely illogicality of the invention and for much of the

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way Allen gratifies our aroused expectations. On the screen from which Baxter has made his exit, the remaining actors are left in consternation. How can they go on with the movie as they have rehearsed it when one of its key characters has deserted them and thereby fatally impaired the continuity? The audience members of this small-town cinema are thoroughly confused; many are resentful and are drawn into arguments with the abandoned screen actors; some are outraged and demand their money back. Someone suggests turning off the projector until the missing actor can be overtaken and returned to his job, but this prospect is greeted with outcries of horror from the decimated cast. Does anyone realize what it feels like, they shudder, to be suddenly blacked out and robbed of one's identity? The cinema manager, helpless, telephones the producer of the film in Hollywood to ask his advice; he, in turn, flummoxed by a crisis that may ruin his reputation, if not his box-office, can think of no better solution than appealing to the actor, Gil Shepherd, who played Tom Baxter, confessing that the character has escaped from the screen and that Shepherd, who made him visual to begin with, is responsible for his continued presence. Shepherd is incredulous. "Escaped from the screen? That's physically impossible!" "Not in New Jersey. There, anything can happen!" By this time there have been reports that in at least five Eastern cities where the film is showing Tom Baxter is forgetting his lines and trying to escape from the screen. "In Detroit he nearly made it."

Whereupon Shepherd arrives in New Jersey, much to the surprise of Baxter ("I play you in the movie"—"*You do*?") and to the increased confusion of Cecelia who finds Shepherd even more of a heart-throb than his phantom. Tom and Cecelia have been discovering the contradictions that neither, under the spell of their illusions, had anticipated. Baxter can't make love to her unless they fade out (remember, this is supposed to be fifty years ago!). He expects things to function for him as they do in the movies; when he climbs into a car, that's all that's necessary for the car to glide into operation. "This is real life," Cecelia informs him. "They don't start without a key!" He takes her to dinner but since he has only stage money with which to pay for it they are shamefully compelled to run for it before the demitasse. Having promised her a night on the town, the only way Baxter can fulfill it is to get back into the screen and take her with him as the scene changes to the Copacabana, seriously upsetting the actors normally in this sequence who are not expecting an extra guest previously unknown to them!

So long as Allen moves lightly across the stepping-stones of the situation he has contrived and, as I suggested, remains in a sense logical, all is well and hilarious. His actors, and the lines they are fed, keep you from asking heavyweight questions. Allen's casting is, as usual, accurate. Jeff Daniels as Baxter and his should-I-say better half, Shepherd, is all the more effective for our being unfamiliar with him. Mia Farrow is faultlessly gauche and appealing. The way she holds her hat on when she runs tells us everything about her.

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Yet Allen does have a narrative problem which is conspicuous if, like some movie critics, you see the film a second time!

Why did those early scenes between Baxter and Cecelia take place in an unpopulated Fun Park, as if emptied for winter? The counter-question, "Why not?," isn't good enough. When a film director establishes a location in which he is going to shoot for some hours, or some days, he'd better know why he picked the place, else he won't know what his view-finder is going to frame. What comment, if any, was being made by the relation of the place to Cecelia and her visitor from the blue? I couldn't detect any and rather than believe that Allen was being unsuccessfully symbolic in some way, I prefer to think that he didn't have anything much in mind except getting to the next reel and that he chose the site because it was isolated and cost-free.

However, just as Baxter, left alone, is getting in and out of the roller-coaster car he is diverted by the friendly whore, which leads to another setting equally baffling: not the setting in itself but the *setup*. Why did we need that sequence? What aspect of the illusive and the real was Allen expecting us to grasp? Why did it miss being funny? Suddenly, in all solemnity, Baxter, confronted by tarts, is discoursing on the sanctity of motherhood! Why, for that matter, when Cecelia's lunkhead husband beats up Baxter, does the altercation take place in a church? I'd rather not bear down on these ambiguities, these tremors, perhaps, of concealed intent. They did not crucially damage the fun but they did make me momentarily nervous. I hope Mr. Allen is not nourishing a moralist. For comedy, vipers are better.

At the close, he recovered. To my mind he ended his film with an altogether appropriate, if merciless, return to the only outcome it could possibly have. Shepherd orders Baxter to get back onto the screen where he belongs and, more persuasive than his shadow had been, convinces Cecelia that it's with him, the author of it all, she should elope—to the real world, to Hollywood. Cecelia, in pathetic defiance of her own middle-class morality, packs her bag for the second time in order to leave her meatloaf master of the house. But when she arrives at the local cinema to meet Shepherd, *The Purple Rose of Cairo* has moved on, replaced by Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers; the title is being taken down from the marquee, Baxter is safely back in the reel, Shepherd has flown to California. (We didn't need the shot of him on the plane, the less so if he, as well as Baxter, are only projections of Cecelia's fantasy. Well, Homer nods.) Cecelia resumes the single escape route she will ever find. If Tom Baxter could come down from the screen and stir up the only excitement available to her, what might not happen now if Fred Astaire, none other, bored with Ginger Rogers, should toss her impatiently aside and descend into the real world for that ideal waltzing partner he has always imagined?

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JILL DOLAN

Text and Context

ONE OF THE PLEASURES OF READING is the play of imagination the words on the page create for me. Since words are basically no more than evocative signs that call up different images for different people, the freedom to create my own mise en scène from an author's script makes reading as much of a creative act as writing. Writing, in fact, could be seen as no more than imposing outlines of potential on the workings of other people's imaginations.

Adaptations of literature for the stage, it would seem, only fulfill the creative play of particular imaginations. The collaborative team of theatre artists huddles over the blueprints of an agreed upon theatrical conception, and the book—open to various incarnations in the reader's eye—becomes fixed as a new, finite text: the stage play. Through the artifice of set design and lighting, casting choices and direction, the potential worlds of the book become the one, tangible world of the stage. Returning to the original after seeing a theatrical adaptation, I always find the stage picture insinuated over the less circumscribed descriptions in the text.

Adaptation, then, involves risk, depending on the popularity of the source material. *Big River*, the Broadway musical adaptation of Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* at the Eugene O'Neill Theatre, won seven 1985 Tonys, including the coveted Best Musical award. But the discrepancies of tone and subtext between the novel and the Broadway production raise questions about the way texts change in different contexts.

Reading is a solitary act, an arrangement between the reader and the absent author that allows time for consideration and critique of the text offered. In the case of *Huckleberry Finn*, reading the text allows the irony and sarcasm of Twain's words to color the reader's response. The notice that precedes the story sets the novel's tone: "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot." After his disclaimer, Twain proceeds to clarify his motive, weave an intricate plot, and deliver his moral—a critique of the American mentality that promoted slavery.

This author's note appears at the beginning of *Big River*, but its meaning and impact changes dramatically, if you will, in the Broadway theatre. The note unfurls like a gigantic piece of parchment paper, and hangs the height of the stage. A performer dressed as Twain mysteriously appears to stand beside it, reading along with the audience. He then glances at the spectators with a wry look and

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slowly strolls off, while the country western music that composes *Big River*'s score twangs in the background.

Already, the humble, poignant book is inflated to Broadway musical proportions, and the author's narrative voice, which murmurs behind Huck's throughout the novel, is effectively silenced. Huck Finn (Daniel H. Jenkins) bounds on to claim the narrative through direct address and, with his lanky figure, blond curls, and earnest good nature, tosses the production into the inconsequential context of a picaresque musical—and nothing more.

In *Big River,* Huck's adventures are certainly picturesque, if devoid of the critical undertones Twain suggested. The Tony award-winning set, designed by co-producer Heidi Landesman, evokes life on the Mississippi in the 1800s with a series of simple but spectacular effects. A sepia-toned map of the region detailed with Huck and Jim's route that covers the proscenium opening through the overture, gives way to the Widow Douglas/Miss Watson set, an oval scrim painting that looks like the frontispiece of an antique book. By alternating front with back lighting (by Richard Riddell), the oval painting fades almost cinematically into scenes of St. Petersburg at night, with lamp lights flickering in windows, or to country scenes that act as backdrops for other locales.

The thrill of spectacle suffuses *Big River,* and time for the audience to applaud the scenery is built into the conventions of the genre. When Huck and Jim set off down the river on their raft, the backdrop shifts into a forced perspective painting of the muddy Mississippi rolling in the distance. The painting widens at the bottom to meet slatted wooden boards that serve either as the river's continuation, or as the steps of the towns that Huck and Jim visit along their way. The lolling progress of the raft from upstage to downstage, back and forth, is truly breathtaking, and draws enthusiastic audience response.

Twain's story, however, takes on very different connotations in the midst of all this spectacle. While slavery, for instance, is a crucial theme in the book, the conventions of Broadway musicals take away the text's intended commentary. *Big River* fails to subvert racial stereotypes because of its theatrical style, even though its content was originally a critique of slavery. The relationship between Huck, with his pretty tenor voice, and Jim, with his resounding bass, recalls the typecasting in other musicals that deal uncritically with racial themes. Jim (Ron Richardson) could just as easily be singing "Ole Man River" in *Showboat* as appearing here. The music Roger Miller (of "King of the Road" fame) composed for the blacks in the cast is either gospel or blues. When Jim and other slaves sing "Free at Last" near the production's end, the music is so sentimental and romanticized that it seems to yearn nostalgically for the old days, when white men so generously gave black people their freedom.

In this production, Huck is much too precious, whiny, and spineless for his moral quandary over whether to help Jim or obey the law to be given much weight or focus. As a result, the issue of slav-

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ery is trivialized and upstaged by the antics of the supporting cast. The Duke (Rene Auberjonois) and The King (Bob Gunton) are played in a broad, slapstick style. Their menace, as they proceed to use Huck and Jim for their own ends, is forced and one-dimensional, although it complements the superficial, cartoonish quality of Huck's struggle.

Childhood, at the Samuel Beckett Theatre on Theatre Row, is a more faithful adaptation of a literary text, in that its mise en scène acknowledges the undesirability of concretizing a text of memories already distorted by time and age. Simone Benmussa's adaptation of Nathalie Sarraute's book brings the author's text to the stage, and allows performer Glenn Close to do little more than read it aloud. The text is schematized and estranged by Benmussa's choice to theatricalize the act of remembering, rather than the memories. The resulting theatre piece, however, is bland and repetitive.

Benmussa uses Sarraute's inquiry into the particular nature of words as a theatrical metaphor. Sarraute's text begins by questioning her motives for evoking her childhood memories, and foregrounds her awareness that perhaps the memories she sets forth are not quite the truth of the events she relates. The magical, almost mystical quality of Sarraute's memories, and the words that attach themselves to the images, are more important than presenting any kind of true or faithful record.

Benmussa captures this musing quality, but the choices she makes in her adaptation of the book work against her carefully constructed mise en scène. Glenn Close is called the "Actress," as though Benmussa intends to clarify immediately that Close is not playing Sarraute, but is merely "acting out" the writer's memories. Close is a vehicle for Sarraute's recollections, an active presence on stage who provides a counterpoint to Sarraute's deep, sonorous taped voice, with its lyrical French accent. Sarraute's dialogic text is already theatrical, but on the page, her dialogue is with herself, a self-reflexive contemplation on the act of remembering.

Placing Glenn Close on stage adds another, and quite different layer to the narrative. Her youth contrasts with the textured quality of Sarraute's age, and Close plays the text from a child's perspective. Although she does not attempt to impersonate a child, there is something of earnest wonder, hurt, and child-like confusion in her delivery and stance. This added layer detracts from the singular, disjunctive narrative of Sarraute's book. On stage, the narrative is shared by two distinct voices, and thrusts the piece into an older theatre convention. Close essentially plays a one-woman show, responding to the voices of unseen characters, and interacting with the passive images of people that spring from her mind.

Wearing a simple black skirt, a white shirt, and black cardigan, Close relates the text in a shadowy downstage space set with black furniture and sharp white light. Upstage, separated by the outlines of tall windows and doors that slide swiftly and soundlessly into place, scenes from Sarraute's past schematically materialize. The

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lighting in the memory scenes is brilliant and clear, as if Sarraute's recollections, whether constructed from truth or not, are sharper than the present from which she remembers.

Her father, mother, and stepmother appear upstage as quickly and quietly as the scenery, then float through the space with a slow, dream-like quality. They are ciphers projected from a contemporary mind into the past, elegantly dressed in fashionable Victorian styles and muted colors, and carefully choreographed. The scenography and staging seem a metaphor for the workings of the mind, in which remembered images appear suddenly in sharp outline, then diffuse into the softer quality of dreams.

Close watches the characters go by through windows, an observer of Sarraute's history. As a performer, she is a dynamic presence with an articulate, well-modulated voice perfect for reading Sarraute's carefully chosen words. But her choice to play youth undermines her physically, forcing her to assume less space on stage, and to balance, as children must do, the desire to take up lots of space with the necessity of acting "like a lady."

Sarraute's gender training, via Close's performance, is visible on stage. From the six-year-old girl who insisted on slashing a hotel settee with a pair of scissors, to the ten-year-old, passionate about books and schooling, Close's movements become progressively smaller and more constricted. When Sarraute's half-sister's birth displaces her from her large, sunlit room in her father's house to cramped quarters in the attic, her demotion is embodied by Close's physical reduction on stage. She sits on the floor in an almost fetal position, regressing farther into her childhood.

The constriction of Close's movement and the circumspection of Benmussa's direction might have been less obvious had *Childhood* not been preceded by a short piece called *For No Good Reason*, in which two men conduct a cerebral competition and move boldly all over the stage. The short piece, also directed by Benmussa, is quintessential Sarraute, full of ellipses, meaningful silences, and the unravelling and expanding into complexity of a single, simple utterance through verbal word play and repetition. A man has been affronted by his brother's response to a boastful remark, and although "It's just words," proceeds both to dissect the response and widen its implications, until the choice between capitalist acquisition and poetic inquisition is spread before actors and spectators alike.

In trademark Benmussa style, the sparse environment is made strange. An upstage panel glides open to reveal two neighbors brought in to judge the men's quarrel; one man walks behind a large, framed set piece that has been established as a window; and the pauses and flurries of activity are carefully modulated. The acting, by Stephen Keep and Max Wright, is so precise, expansive, and expressive, and their movement choices so varied, that when Close appears, confined by her small pumps and her silk skirt, the contrast is jarring. From this boldly directed, active curtain-raiser, the compression of the space as Close assumes the stage to relate *Childhood* is almost palpable.

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WENDY LESSER

Bloated and Shrunken Worlds

IN A FEW OF THE NOVELS UNDER REVIEW—including David Lodge's *Small World*, from which I've adapted my title—the geographical, temporal, or psychological distortions are purposeful and effective. On these few occasions, the leanings toward gigantism or nearsightedness lend wit or gravity to the books' subjects by pointing to the disproportion between the large and the small view. But in the majority of new novels I've read this season, scope has been the author's nemesis. Some of these writers try too hard to be vast and significant, with a resulting thud as one hears the authorial effort drop ponderously to the ground, too heavy to be sustained by its meager wings of imagination. Others focus intently on minutiae, plunging themselves unwittingly into interior psychologies or tight little societies that purport to represent larger sections of humanity, but don't. One is left, having digested these nine novels, with the sense that something is severely off in the current novelists' sense of scale. The contemporary nature of these shortcomings is confirmed by the fact that the better novels in the batch actually *are* older (like Rebecca West's *This Real Night*) or follow older forms (Lodge's *Small World* is patterned on a medieval romance, while R. G. Vliet's *Scorpio Rising* draws extensively on Faulknerian technique).

This Real Night[1] is really a sequel to an earlier novel, *The Fountain Overflows*, which appeared in 1957. Apparently Rebecca West worked on this second volume of her proposed trilogy about the Aubrey family from the late 1950s to her death in 1983, when she left the manuscript in a nearly finished state. This recent publication, then, represents the first chance for *Fountain* fans to get their hands on additional material about the eccentric, musical, fascinating Aubreys. One can read *This Real Night* without having read the earlier novel and still get a coherent sense of plot and character; to that extent, the work is complete in itself. But the novel loses something when detached from its more powerful elder sibling, so that to read the sequel after reading *Fountain* is paradoxically a richer as well as more disappointing experience than to read it alone.

The Fountain Overflows is one of the best novels written in English about families, about a child's view of the world, and about a developing artist. Rose Aubrey, the narrator, has that special combina-

[1]THIS REAL NIGHT, by *Rebecca West*. Viking. $16.95.

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tion of self-effacement and deeply observant intelligence that makes for the most engaging first-person characters. Her father, Piers Aubrey, is a compelling if disturbing Edwardian figure: a disinherited Irish aristocrat, he composes passionate and beautifully written political pamphlets, makes a mess of every paying job he takes, and eventually runs out on his bankrupt family. The mother, Clare, is a former concert pianist who holds the family together (despite her own nearly overwhelming eccentricities) and trains two of her four children, Rose and her twin Mary, to be professional pianists themselves. The other two children, Cordelia and Richard Quin, are notable mainly for their tendencies to be, respectively, completely hateful and completely lovable. The novel uses a slow accumulation of daily detail to build an enormous feeling of suspense in a way that is typical of West's work (and that even managed to seep into the recent film of her *Return of the Soldier*). What I've called "suspense" makes you want to follow these characters through the rest of their lives, learning exactly how each one turns out; and this intense curiosity is both fueled and taunted by the fact that the novel ends when the children are adolescents.

This Real Night, then, would at first seem to be a wish fulfilled. But though the novel is an excellent one by most standards, it is a definite step down from *The Fountain Overflows*, whose comparative richness almost makes *This Real Night* seem like one of those sequels written by a different author—an *Edwin Drood* or *The Watsons* recently completed by some devoted Dickens or Austen fan. That is not quite fair. The lucid prose and eye for detail in *This Real Night* are clearly West's, and the sequel shares with its predecessor an uncanny ability to set the tragedies and triumphs of individuals (Richard Quin's early death, Rose and Mary's musical achievements) intelligently and persuasively within the larger historical context of the Edwardian era and the First World War. But the vividness of the earlier work is missing. Part of the problem is due to the absence of Mr. Aubrey (by now dead as well as vanished), whose charismatic masculinity in the face of both success and failure provided a necessary counterbalance in the heavily feminine Aubrey family. With him gone, *This Real Night* perhaps reads too much like a paean to feminist strength, which it isn't. Another aspect of the problem is the change in narrative tone. Rose-the-child had a marvelously fresh and captivating vision of the world, without in any way ignoring its darker side, whereas Rose-the-adult varies between ecstatic enthusiasm and self-conscious grief. As a result, the personalities of all the people she portrays are much less fluid and subtle (especially in the case of Richard Quin and beautiful Cousin Rosamund, both of whom become unbearably good); and even the nature descriptions, frequent but credible in the early novel, turn excessively lush. The world of *This Real Night* is approximately the same size as that of *The Fountain Overflows*, but it is painted with a

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cruder brush. Still, the novel provides deep and satisfying pleasures that ought not to be missed.

David Lodge's *Small World*[2] satisfies an entirely different urge on the part of the novel reader, but one that is no less central: the desire for a neatly dovetailing comic plot. If West is a descendant of Samuel Richardson, Lodge is writing firmly in the Fielding tradition. Like *This Real Night*, *Small World* is a sequel; but unlike the West novel, it surpasses its predecessor, Lodge's 1970s *Changing Places*. Once again we meet an irritating though endearing bunch of English and American literary academics: the swashbuckling Morris Zapp, the carefully ambitious Philip Swallow, and a host of familiar minor characters. To this well-simmered stew the author has now added a wonderful new ingredient, the young Irish lecturer Persse McGarrigle, whose quest for a particular beautiful maiden forms the heart of what Lodge has subtitled "An Academic Romance." Persse is the kind of sharp-minded ingenue who makes up a catchy book topic on the spot (the influence of T. S. Eliot on William Shakespeare) to engage the interest of a publisher, naively allows the idea to be stolen by an unscrupulous older academic, and then bravely denounces the theft at a professional conference. Conferences, on a worldwide scale, are the settings of this far-flung romance; American Express cards are the snorting chargers, and highly paid academic sinecures the Holy Grails. Deceptive Spenserian ladies obstruct the path of the true knight (Persse thinks he is chasing the chaste, scholarly Angelica Pabst, but unwittingly ends up with her identical twin, the porn queen Lily Papps), and as in all good romances, the least likely candidate—one Miss Sybil Maiden of Girton College—turns out to be the long-lost mother of the two twin girls. The plot has many clever twists, and even the predictable ones are amusing. This novel is really the very opposite of a "small world": it overflows with an abundance of absurd new characters and outrageous plots, multiplying one upon the other almost faster than you can keep track, yet eventually bringing them all safely home to a neatly tied conclusion.

What makes *Small World* better than *Changing Places* is not only the literary intelligence of its romance plot, but the well-chosen object of its satire. The earlier novel focused on the cultural differences between a British university very much like Birmingham and an American university very much like Berkeley, which in the early 1970s meant mostly the amount and kind of extramarital sex their faculty were engaging in. The targets here were very broad, and the dependence on cultural stereotypes as the basis for the humor made the book itself feel clichéd. In *Small World*, on the other hand, the major objects of satire are the new brands of literary theory and the accompanying ambitions of their various proponents. In nar-

[2]SMALL WORLD, by *David Lodge*. Macmillan. $15.95.

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rowing the target, Lodge has perhaps narrowed his potential audience; it helps, for instance, to know that the link between power acquisition and literary studies *has* become more naked as deconstructionism, postmodernism, and their fellow "isms" have come forward. But who can fail to enjoy the unmistakable case of Freudian transference which the despicable Robin Dempsey develops in regard to the computer ELIZA? How can one not be amused by the long-distance radio interview conducted between the Australian academic Rodney Wainright and the Angry Middleaged British novelist Ronald Frobisher? The latter ends with an exchange between Wainright and his producer Greg, who—having forgotten to close down the line—don't realize that Frobisher is "eavesdropping from twelve thousand miles away":

> "You think he's washed up?"
> "I'm sure he is," said Rodney Wainright. "He had absolutely nothing to say about postmodernism. He didn't even seem to understand the question."
> Ronald Frobisher bent to switch on the sound engineer's mike. "You can stick your question about postmodernism up your arse, Wainright," he said.
> There was a stunned silence from the antipodes. Then, "Who said that?" Wainright quavered.
> "Jesus," said Greg.
> "Jesus?"
> "I mean, Jesus, the fucking line is still open," said Greg.

Small World is a novel that will occasionally make you laugh out loud, especially if you've ever been in close contact with the genus *academicus literarius*. It's not as good as *Lucky Jim*—nothing is, in this category—but it approaches near enough to deserve a place on the permanent roster.

Scorpio Rising[3] is as different from the two previously discussed novels as they are from each other. All it shares with them is a certain unmistakable level of literary quality. One reads it and feels one has discovered a brilliant new writer destined to produce many fascinating novels. Unfortunately, this will not be the case: R. G. Vliet died of cancer a few days after finishing this manuscript. While this is neither here nor there as far as literary merit goes, it does make you treasure his scenes and sentences in a way you might not if numerous others were known to be forthcoming.

Those who hate astrology should not be scared off by the title, which has very little to do with either the content or the tone of the book. Structurally the novel consists of two separate tales told back-to-back: the first a present-day narration by an oddly appealing

[3]SCORPIO RISING, by *R.G. Vliet.* Random House. $16.95.

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hunchbacked character named Rudy who lives in Massachusetts but hails from Texas, and the second a turn-of-the-century description of the tragic life of Victoria Ann Castleberry, Rudy's grandmother. Exactly how the second story connects to the first is never made quite clear: is it a hallucination on Rudy's part (he's suffering from a high fever when we leave him at the end of Tale One), or an authorial explanation of Rudy's background, or neither, or both? This open-endedness is not irritating, though I would have liked the novel to circle back to Rudy somehow at the end; as it stands, the story closes in the grandmother's world and never gets back to the present. Still, if the factual connection between the two tales is not obvious, the literary and genealogical one is. The story of the beautiful Victoria Ann's illicit love affair with the town hunchback "explains" (though the word is too clumsy) a great deal about the otherwise mysterious Rudy.

Scorpio Rising is one of the few novels I've read which successfully borrows Faulknerian technique. The monologue tone of the first half is not merely an artistic tic, but a well-founded presentation of character, and it enables the people around Rudy as well as the narrator himself to come fully to life. The lush style of the second half, with its heavy share of italicized material, might seem pretentious and overbearing in less skilled hands, but Vliet knows exactly how far to go and he never lets the tone become melodramatic. The two styles are both authorial disguises, in the sense that they contain numerous idiomatic expressions representing the thought and language of their characters. But this technique never seems condescending; on the contrary, the language of the novel is especially rich *because* it stems from local idioms and individual viewpoints.

Vliet's novel demonstrates, by contrast, what is wrong with Russell Banks's *Continental Drift*.[4] Banks, too, would like to be Faulkner, but he most definitely isn't, and the places where he tries hardest for that oracular, convoluted, world-encompassing voice are where the novel falls flattest. *Continental Drift* isn't a bad book; it's just not good enough for its ambitions. The portrait of the central character, Bob Dubois—an oil burner repairman who moves from New Hampshire to Florida to make his fortune, but eventually finds only despair and death—is compelling and believable, and the chapters devoted to his fate are almost all quite good. But Banks has intertwined Dubois' fate with that of a black Haitian woman named Vanise Dorsinville, and herein lies the novel's Achilles' heel. For Banks to attempt to tell Vanise's story from the inside is a monstrous presumption, as he himself suggests when he says of Bob Dubois and his black lover Marguerite:

> Bob knows very little of what it is to be a woman, nothing at all

[4]CONTINENTAL DRIFT, by *Russell Banks*. Harper & Row. $17.95.

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> of what it is to be black. He's honest and intelligent enough to admit this and behave accordingly, but like most white men, he's not imaginative enough to believe that being a woman is extremely different from being a man and being black extremely different from being white.

One begins to wonder, though, exactly *who* lacks imagination when one reads sentences from Banks's Vanise chapters like: "If, however, we are a poor, middle-aged woman with five children living in a daub-and-wattle cabin in the hill country of Haiti a few kilometers west of Port-aux-Paix on the north coast, we know the hurricane comes because the loas have not been properly fed." It's that falsely empathetic "we" that grates in the ear—so different, for example, from George Orwell's direct but coolly removed "you."

Even the Vanise chapters are not the worst thing about *Continental Drift*; that status is reserved for the incredibly pretentious opening "Invocation" and closing "Envoi." Here the restrained italics found in Vliet's Faulknerian passages have taken on epidemic proportions, engulfing everything else. The Invocation announces (lest you fail to pick up on them yourself) the epic aims of the novel: "*This is an American story of the late twentieth century, and you don't need a muse to tell it, you need something more like a loa, or mouth-man, a voice that makes speech stand in front of you and not behind, for there's nothing here that depends on memory for the telling.*" And Banks's Envoi closes with both a bang and a whimper, of egomaniacal proportions: "*Sabotage and subversion, then, are this book's objectives. Go, my book, and help destroy the world as it is.*" Chaucer he isn't, and the self-invoked comparison is distressingly arrogant.

Elizabeth Tallent's first novel[5] suffers from the opposite problem to Banks's: whereas his vision is gargantuan, hers is a bit too finely focused. Tallent is an extremely skilled short-story writer, as her collection *In Constant Flight* and her more recent work in *The New Yorker* demonstrate. But *Museum Pieces*, in spreading that skill over the length of a book, has left behind the sharp pointedness of her stories without acquiring the necessary breadth of a novel. We can still find, in this book, the best qualities of Tallent's writing—notably her eye for visual detail, her perfect sense of gesture, and her ability to formulate the exact linguistic expression of a state of mind, whether through metaphor, through surrounding environment, or through direct speech. And *Museum Pieces* has its compelling moments, especially when its narration resides with Peter, the Santa Fe archaeologist whose profession provides the book's title. But as a story of a modern-day separation and divorce, seen from the viewpoints of teenage daughter Tara, wife Clarissa, husband Peter, and Peter's new girlfriend Mia, the novel lacks propulsion. It

[5]MUSEUM PIECES, by *Elizabeth Tallent*. Knopf. $14.95.

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meanders, contemplates, and sidesteps, but it rarely progresses (except in a gratuitous car-accident scene thrown in, I suppose, as a "necessary" climax). There is nothing really wrong with Tallent's characters; they just don't seem animated enough to occupy 233 pages. They don't offend or irritate, but neither do they invite sympathy or curiosity.

One begins to appreciate the virtues of *Museum Pieces*, however, after reading Elizabeth Benedict's *Slow Dancing*.[6] This, too, is a novel about life among modern, divorced, occasionally child-laden young professionals, this time set in Los Angeles and New York rather than Santa Fe. But whereas Tallent is a serious, careful, perhaps even overly scrupulous writer who would never set down an ugly sentence, Benedict has the literary sensibility of a Women's Pages columnist in a daily newspaper. I find it little short of amazing that she dares to have one of her characters reading—and deploring—*Passages*, when her own approach to fiction draws so heavily on that particular style of cultural analysis. *Slow Dancing* is very much an "eighties" novel about "lifestyles," an examination of "issues" (How highly should a woman value female friends in comparison to male lovers? What sacrifices are necessary in making a commitment to someone? How much should things like geographical preference and career demands impinge on a friendship or marriage?) posing as a work of fiction. The book's central characters are the unintentionally obnoxious Lexi Steiner, her best friend Nell, and her new boyfriend David. Of course these people all have high-powered "interesting" jobs: Lexi is a legal-aid lawyer, Nell a freelance writer, and David a successful journalist. The big plot question revolves around whether Lexi can separate herself from Nell—and from a friendship so close it is *just* this side of lesbianism—sufficiently to take up seriously with David. Difficult though it is to believe, these characters are supposedly in their late twenties and thirties rather than their early teens, when such conflicts usually hold sway.

The characters in Nancy Willard's first novel[7] *are* in their teens, but they are solid enough and unusual enough to carry the weight of an adult story. *Things Invisible to See*, set in the period of World War II, revolves around the characters Ben Harkissian—a high-school baseball star in Ann Arbor who eventually gets drafted and stationed in the Pacific—and Clare Bishop, the girl he accidentally hits with a baseball, temporarily paralyzes, and proceeds to fall in love with. The book is also peopled with a host of shadowy background figures ranging from Ben's evil brother Willie, to the black citizens of Ann Arbor (who are mostly household servants and mystics), to helpful ghosts such as Clare's Ancestress. The climax of the

[6]SLOW DANCING, by *Elizabeth Benedict*. Knopf. $15.95.
[7]THINGS INVISIBLE TO SEE, by *Nancy Willard*. Knopf. $14.95.

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novel is a winner-takes-all baseball game between Ben's hometown team and a ghostly company of history's best players (Lou Gehrig, Christy Mathewson, etc.) led by Death himself. *Things Invisible to See* is a baseball story along the lines of *The Natural*—the movie, not the book. At its best, it rises to the level of myth; at its worst, it tends toward whimsy. This whimsical quality might be called preciousness in a less well-written book, but Nancy Willard's grasp on historical reality is very strong. The atmosphere *feels* like the 1940s, even in terms of the book's racial situation, which delicately stops just this side of offensiveness (and internally comments on that potential offensiveness). *Things Invisible to See* is Willard's first fiction for grown-ups—she has previously published poetry and children's books—and though the novel's predecessors leak through in the insistence on a lyrical, magical world, there is still something darkly appealing about the work—appealing *because* it allows darkness to mingle with the lyricism.

If *Things Invisible to See* is all heart (and suffers from the drawbacks thereof), *Flaubert's Parrot*[8] is all head. Its author, British television critic Julian Barnes, describes the work as his third novel, but there is nothing particularly novelistic about this commentary—one might say rant—on Flaubert's life and work. Instead, it seems as if Barnes had a lot of things he wanted to say about Flaubert but couldn't bear to be trammeled by the constraints of either biography or literary criticism. Seating himself on the throne of fiction, he therefore felt free to throw stones at those two other structures without bothering to reinforce the transparent walls of his own refuge. The task Barnes set himself is not inherently impossible. Brecht, after all, created fictional biography in *Galileo*, while Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and Swift's *Tale of a Tub* are both successful (if self-mocking) examples of a marriage between fiction and literary criticism. But the sole fictional element in *Flaubert's Parrot* is the narrator, Geoffrey Braithwaite, ostensibly an elderly English doctor obsessed with Flaubert. Most of the time J. B. seems to forget that G. B. exists: we get little sense of any transmitting personality other than the author's. In only one chapter—the one where Braithwaite discloses the infidelities of his beloved late wife—does the book begin to suggest the novel it could have become. Here, in the reflections of a man who is simultaneously self-conscious and obtuse, we are given a vision of what that other doctor, Charles Bovary, might have felt if he had been capable of comprehending Emma's tragedy. But for the most part *Flaubert's Parrot* ranges from the petty to the merely clever. It has its amusing moments (particularly in the first and last chapters, which are about parrots), but it also has its points of extreme stupidity, notably in the chapter called "The Case Against," which sets up straw-man arguments against Flaubert and

[8]FLAUBERT'S PARROT, by *Julian Barnes*. Knopf. $13.95.

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then flamboyantly knocks them down. The book purports to be anti-literary-critical, but I can't imagine that many non-critics—many people who simply read novels, that is—would be very interested in it. As a piece of writing, it shares Flaubert's worst flaws (his coldness, for instance, and his desire to be reductive) without possessing any of his overwhelming virtues.

Men and Angels[9] is another work which allows its didactic skeleton to poke through the novelistic flesh, though in a very different manner from that of *Flaubert's Parrot*. Mary Gordon's new novel is a very fleshy creature, for one thing. It has plot and characters and a moment-of-truth climax and all those other old-fashioned fictional characteristics. It also has a much narrower notion of didacticism than Barnes's book. While *Flaubert's Parrot* darts into all sorts of philosophical and critical corners, *Men and Angels* essentially boils down to a single question: can a woman have a fully satisfying artistic or professional career and also be a good mother? In order to arrive at this so-called dilemma, Gordon is obliged to cheat outrageously. For instance, the heroine Anne Foster faces the choice of hiring psychotic, bible-thumping, twenty-year-old Laura as her children's nanny, or staying home to care for them herself and thus giving up her satisfying work as an art historian. But surely there must have been *someone* else in the college town of Selby who could be more reliably employed to care for children? No, because that would provide a way out of Gordon's strict system of two-value logic. Moreover, Anne doesn't even seem to recognize that Laura is functionally schizophrenic, though elsewhere the novel tries to persuade us that she is very much the sort of person who notices things about other people. This discrepancy, which seems unintentional on the author's part, unbalances the whole work and detracts severely from its sense of carefully weighed choices. Its moral might just as easily be "Pay attention when you interview a prospective nanny"—hardly the world-shaking conclusion Gordon is after.

The case against Anne's subject of study, the early-twentieth-century painter Caroline Watson, is similarly stacked. Caroline (a fictional amalgam of Mary Cassatt and others) gets to be a great artist, but at the expense of her only child, who dies unloved and unmourned when still a relatively young man. In *Men and Angels*, causality is never casual. All actions have extreme or dire effects. Whereas in real life children often survive horrible family backgrounds, and even society's unloved members manage to get on quite passably (as unloved people do, for instance, in Barbara Pym's novels), here the indifference of the parent or guardian is immediately visited on the child or child-substitute in drastic measure. Thus Laura's unloving parents produce a psychotic; Caroline Watson's selfishness somehow results in her son's general failure and

[9]MEN AND ANGELS, by *Mary Gordon*. Random House. $16.95.

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early death; and Anne's dismissal of Laura (at long last!) sets off Laura's suicide. Because we can't credit the circumstances that create these dilemmas, it is impossible for us to accept the choices Gordon presents us with. The hampering limitations on action seem to exist only within her fictional world, and not to be drawn from the world we live in. This problem of authorial manipulation has been increasingly present in Mary Gordon's work: it was minor in *Final Payments* but became more noticeable in *The Company of Women*, and it virtually destroys *Men and Angels*. Because Gordon initially gave great promise as a novelist, this decline in her work is especially saddening.

Such novelistic failures seem to come from too grandiose a notion of what fiction should "accomplish," too heavy a sense that the author is obliged to expand the fictional world beyond the ephemera of everyday life to the realm of the deeply philosophical. Unfortunately, only the very greatest novelists can be philosophers as well, and none of the writers under review here approaches that rank. It takes a Kafka or a Proust to focus on minutiae, a Dostoyevsky or a Melville to encompass vast regions. For most writers of fiction, it would be safer—and wiser—to tailor the scale of their novelistic worlds to the average size of their own talents.

Notes on Contributors *(continued from page 454)*

North Point Press has just published WENDELL BERRY's *Collected Poems 1957-1982* as well as a revised edition of his first novel, *Nathan Coulter*.

CHARLES GULLANS' latest books are *Under Red Skies* and *Local Winds* (R. L. Barth, 1983, 1985) and *The Bright Universe* (Abattoir, 1983).

MARCIA B. SIEGEL directed a six-week Summer Institute in Movement Analysis at New York University's Department of Performance Studies.

JILL DOLAN* is a theatre critic in New York City, and the managing editior of *Women & Performance Journal*. She is at work on a book of essays on feminist criticism in theatre and performance.

WENDY LESSER is the editor of *The Threepenny Review*. She recently completed a book manuscript called *The Idea of The Underground*.

DEAN FLOWER was recently appointed chairman of the English Department at Smith College.

CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK teaches at Williams College.

MICHAEL GORRA is an assistant professor in the English Department at Smith College.

JAY PARINI was recently awarded a Fellowship of the American Council of Learned Societies. He has also finished a new book of poems, *Town Life*, and a novel, *The Patch Boys*.

ROBERT LEITER is a short story writer, editor and critic who lives in Philadelphia. He is now at work on a novel.

ROBERT McDOWELL lives in Santa Cruz. He is co-editor of *The Reaper* and co-publisher at Story Line Press.

**Asterisk indicates a new contributor.*

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DEAN FLOWER

Eudora Welty Come from Away

GOVERNOR ADLAI STEVENSON OF ILLINOIS once wrote, as he vetoed a bill to establish a leash-law for cats, that "it is in the nature of cats to do a certain amount of unescorted roaming." My own cat, a large black male named Sir Rabbit, observes this principle tirelessly. He appeared at the door one night about six years ago, and has been around more or less ever since. Neither a wildcat wanderer nor a stay-at-home, he tends to come back like a hungry teenager and then depart again almost at once, as if home were scorching to his feet. In most ways he has lived up to his namesake in *The Golden Apples:*

> In the night time,
> At the right time,
> So I've understood,
> 'Tis the habit of Sir Rabbit
> To dance in the wood—

The tune runs through Mattie Will Sojourner's head when she meets the elusive King McLain, out roaming the woods—as he always is—of Morgana, Mississippi, or else the whole wide world, appearing only to disappear, the type and emblem of the central question in so much of Eudora Welty's fiction: are the wanderers better off than the home-bodies? Having seen more of the world, do they see more of the world? Or are they weakened by their rootlessness, magical to others but confused by their own unsettled identities? Aren't they, as Cassie Morrison thinks in "June Recital," "human beings terribly at large, roaming the face of the earth . . . like lost beasts"?

Sometimes the answer to this question has seemed clear. In her first published story, "Death of a Travelling Salesman" (1936), Welty's argument apparently lies all on the side of staying in place. The salesman wants to drive his car "past things that happened to people, quicker than their happening," and he dies only dimly aware of how lost he is. The theme expands in "The Hitch-Hikers" (1939) where another travelling salesman comes to feel the emptiness of his experience, as if reality could only belong "to the people of these towns he passed through, coming out of their rooted pasts . . . , coming out of their time." The dubious moral sense of one character after another—Mr. Petrie and Mrs. Pike in "Petrified

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Man," Steve in "Keela, the Outcast Indian Maiden," Cash and Miss Baby Marie in "Livvie," to name only a few of the best-known—is related to estrangement from place. The suffering of other characters—Powerhouse, Ran and Eugene McLain, Miss Eckhart, Easter, the American girl in "The Bride of the Innisfallen"—seems equally to be a function of their distance from home or dislocation from community and family. So at least runs the Agrarian paradigm of Welty's fiction, and it is not wholly wrong.

From the beginning critics have seen Welty as securely placed. Katherine Anne Porter wrote in 1941, "Being a child of her place and time, profiting perhaps without being aware of it by the cluttered experiences, foreign travels, and disorders of the generation immediately preceding her, [Welty] will never have to go away and live among the Eskimos, or Mexican Indians . . ." Ruth Vande Kieft, who wrote the first book-length study of Welty in 1962, noticed that the biographical facts give us reason to call Welty a "second generation" Southerner and to appreciate how her parents from Ohio and West Virginia gave her detachment from "that strong sense of blood inheritance" that shaped so many other Southern writers ("we have . . . a vision of Moses' face as he pulverized our idols," said Flannery O'Connor). But Vande Kieft still took Welty's true country to be the Natchez Trace, and has continued to emphasize it in subsequent criticism: "Miss Welty's own place is, of course, Mississippi—its towns and countryside, its red clay farms and hills, its pine forests, lakes, rivers, and Delta bottoms." Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha has also provided critics with a tempting but deceptive parallel to Welty's Morgana and Natchez Trace. That she was born in Jackson, found her profession as a writer at home, and has remained there apart from occasional forays and displacements ever since, seems to corroborate all these arguments for keeping Welty in her place.

Her 1956 essay, "Place in Fiction," has frequently been used to clinch the argument: "I think the sense of Place is as essential to good and honest writing as a logical mind; surely they are somewhere related. It is by knowing where you stand that you grow able to judge where you are." This does indeed sound as if Welty were echoing the Agrarian manifesto of 1930 and taking her stand. "Sense of place gives equilibrium; extended, it is sense of direction too." Clearly this language refers to people in general, not just writers: "It is through Place that we put down roots, wherever and whenever birth, chance, fate, or our travelling selves may set us down; but where the roots reach toward is the deep and running vein of the human understanding." Small wonder that so many readers have felt secure in claiming that her best work arises from a deep sense of place. And yet it strikes me that the governing trope of the passage just quoted is not roots at all but travel.

In the spring of 1983 Welty went to Harvard to give the William

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E. Massey Sr. Lectures in the History of American Civilization, and these have now been published in a single slim volume of autobiography.[1] Always reticent in the past when questioned about her own history and always scrupulously self-effacing as a storyteller, Welty took the occasion at Harvard to offer some personal revelations. Perhaps the most startling is this one:

> It was not my intention—it never was—to invent a character who should speak for me, the author, in person. . . . . Yet, it seems to me now, years after I wrote *The Golden Apples*, that I did bring forth a character with whom I came to feel oddly in touch. This is Miss Eckhart, a woman who has come from away to give piano lessons to the young in Morgana.

Hesitant and cautious as this is, it still asserts a unique intimacy between author and character. Welty goes on to recall the strange German immigrant in "June Recital" who was "scarcely accepted in the town," "formidable" and "eccentric," yet driven by "the love of her art and the love of giving it, the desire to give it until there is no more left." Emphatically this was not a version of Welty's own piano teacher, who rapped her knuckles with a fly-swatter, but someone "miles away from . . . anybody I did know." Yet it was nevertheless someone with whom she deeply identified, someone "from away."

Welty might have felt "oddly in touch" with several other artist-teacher-performers in her fiction: Powerhouse of the vast volcanic energies is one, the Spanish guitarist Montalbano in "Music from Spain" is another, the version of Audubon in "A Still Moment" a third. They have in common with Miss Eckhart an experience of profound isolation in their calling, an identity masked to the point of genderless anonymity, and a spirit of willing endurance. They are all wanderers. That Welty has now chosen to single out Miss Eckhart, some thirty-five years after the story was published, suggests that something more must be involved. Miss Eckhart's role was not just to impart "*the* Beethoven" in the discouraging realm of provincial Mississippi, but to embody the cost of that struggle as well. One must recall Miss Eckhart's fearsome old mother in her wheel chair, hovering nearby like a disease, or the callous tale of Miss Eckhart's rape ("She had been walking by herself after dark; nobody told her any better"), or her alien presence at the grave of Mr. Sissum, the one man she might have married, with her clothing and her grief all "wrong" and "unstylish." There are innumerable other glimpses both ludicrous and grim: Miss Eckhart's lessons interrupted by Mr. Voight from upstairs who is nude under his exhibition-

[1]ONE WRITER'S BEGINNINGS, by *Eudora Welty*. Harvard University Press. $10.00.

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ist's bathrobe; Miss Eckhart ostracized for suspected loyalty to the Kaiser in 1918; "old lady Eckhart" hoeing peas at the county poor farm as seen by the Morrison family, out for a Sunday drive. Surely the saddest note of all is Miss Eckhart's despairing attempt to burn down the house where her passions lived and died. If her author now declares herself "oddly in touch with" her character, it suggests at the deepest level a desire to define herself as not rooted in one time and place but rather as an outsider, alienated by the community, perhaps even frustrated, angered, and despairing. The fire burning in Miss Eckhart's brain, and by the end of the story in Cassie Morrison's, the fire that comes from Yeats's "Song of the Wandering Angus" and seems to stand for the never-satisfied longings of the inner self, burns with both a creative and destructive fury.

"I was also part Cassie in that same story," Welty told her Harvard audience, "the girl who hung back" and who "came of a sheltered life." But the autobiography as a whole dramatizes a far less provincial self than that. Jackson, Mississippi, in fact determines surprisingly little of this writer's beginnings. She emerges instead from listening to her parents' voices, learning their origins from the stories they told and the way they spoke, hearing the remoter melodies of her mother's West Virginia family and of her father's people from southern Ohio. She "listens back" to the memory of a music box played in the evenings in grandfather Welty's farmhouse, and hears the "unspeakable loneliness" that her father must have grown up in, an only child surrounded by elders. She remembers her mother washing dishes after supper and singing to herself, "O the West Virginia hills!" or telling her daughter proudly, "A mountaineer always will be *free*!" Distant journeys are just as important as distant voices. All of the most dramatic episodes of Welty's life, it seems, concern travel: the annual summer trips by car to each of her parents' homes, her mother's journey with her dying father to Baltimore at age fifteen, and her return with her father's body in a coffin on the same train; her father's journey to Nova Scotia in 1903 where he might just as easily have settled as in Jackson; the arrival by train of a magical bottle of champagne that cured her mother's septicemia; her own first journey to the new world of college, two hundred miles north in Columbus, Mississippi; her longer journey to the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where she discovered not just Yeats's poem but the fire of her own ambition; and after her sojourn at the Columbia Business School in New York, her WPA job in the early 1930s which took her to every county in Mississippi ("I saw my home state at close hand, really for the first time"). By such designs Welty lays claim to a larger world, and a deeper vision, than the ones fate seemed to have fixed upon her outwardly. "Through travel I first became aware of the outside world," she writes; "it was through travel that I found my own introspective way into becoming a part of it."

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The autobiography has three chapters, two of which refer to the writer's ability to hear: "Listening," "Learning to See," and "Finding a Voice." Not surprisingly, the chapter on seeing depends just as much as the others do on memory's hearing—like the sound of her mother's voice reciting poems from McGuffey's Reader when she was "lying helpless and nearly blind" in old age. These were poems she memorized as a youthful schoolteacher in West Virginia, and they resound for her daughter as Miss Eckhart's music does: "Reciting, her voice took on resonance and firmness, it rang with the old fervor, with ferocity even." Welty shapes her whole memoir around such music. For the kind of writer she is, voice is everything. Whether reading, writing, or just listening to people, Welty finds her bearings and takes possession through the human voice. In "Listening" she describes her experience of reading and makes a point everywhere implicit in her fiction: "As my eyes followed the sentence, a voice was saying it silently to me. It isn't . . . the voice of any person I can identify, certainly not my own. It is human but inward, and it is inwardly that I listen to it." Writing is almost the same, a process of listening for that authentic inward voice: "The sound of what falls on the page begins the process of testing it for truth, for me. Whether I am right to trust so far I don't know." These are not the methods of a realistic or documentary writer who finds truth in externals, things seen, evidence recorded, nor of the imperious artificer whose realm is his own supreme invention (Joyce, Faulkner, Nabokov). Welty prefers instead to be the chameleon poet, who takes on the auditory coloration of her surroundings and remains herself elusive. Whether she has been right to surrender so much to her voices (as she so self-effacingly wonders) is not for anyone else to decide: the surrender in *Losing Battles* was for many readers too complete, and what might have been a medley of voices often became a sprawl and a confusion, while the surrender to Edna Earle's voice in *The Ponder Heart* or to sister's in "Why I Live at the P. O." have come to seem the perfection of artistic wisdom. The remarkable thing about Welty's listening to "the sound of what falls on the page" is its seeming passivity. It places her exactly nowhere—which, God knows, is a powerful position.

So one must question the extent to which Welty's use of voice is distinctively Southern or regional. When Faulkner pulls out the stops of his oratorical rhetoric, the shades of several generations come to life and flags are trampled in the dust. When Flannery O'Connor writes a personal letter ("The Easter Bunny brought my mother a two-ton truck") or hears a character talk ("You take a boy thirteen year old is equal in meanness to a man twict his age"), the voice remains essentially the same. But in Welty's fiction one must differentiate the colloquial voices ("If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?") from the inward voice of the story itself. Unforgettable and authentic as Welty's overheard voices are, her deeper interest lies in

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the inward voice which does not attach to one time or one place. Nowhere in her fiction does she more effectively play off one sort of voice against the other than in *The Golden Apples* where anti-climactic comedy in the colloquial world jars against a profound human mystery—the near drowning of Easter in Moon Lake, for example, or Miss Eckhart's aborted fire in "June Recital." The authority of vernacular wisdom dissolves, and we can hear a music or discern a radiance come from away. Welty once described herself to an interviewer as being "locally underfoot," which nicely expresses her amused, compliant, affectionate, but still separate and slightly awkward sense of being a writer in her community. She knows their voices, they belong to her, but they are not her only voices.

The autobiography concludes with this emphasis. The deeper self is a traveller, and refuses to be defined by a place. Welty evokes Virgie Rainey of "The Wanderers" as yet another *alter ego* like Miss Eckhart, "passionate, recalcitrant, stubbornly undefeated," and convinced that "there is a world that remains out there, a world living and mysterious, and that she is of it." It is clear from such statements that the whole autobiography is a reading of not only Welty's life and career but a re-reading of her own fiction. Its theme is the stubborn refusal to be wholly defined by home, and it suggests such inferences as these: George is the hero of *Delta Wedding* because he eludes the roles imposed on him by family and convention, while little Laura, "poor motherless girl," is luckier not to be in that family; likewise, Easter in "Moon Lake" has power because she's an orphan, and she is the one things happen to; old Phoenix Jackson triumphs in "A Worn Path" because she refuses to stay put; the American girl in "The Bride of the Innisfallen" recovers her balance and perspective among strangers on a train in a foreign country; the only happy character in "The Hitch-Hikers" is the itinerant guitarist, Sanford, whose music creates a home anywhere, just as it does for Powerhouse, Montalbano, and Miss Eckhart; even old Uncle Daniel in *The Ponder Heart* (who lavishes love and money on anyone) escapes the dreadful duties of home quite as successfully as King McLain or Lily Daw or Livvie or the host of other happily recalcitrant travelers in Welty's world.

Recent criticism, unfortunately, has gone in the opposite direction. Albert J. Devlin, in a profoundly unpersuasive book, has sought to "locate [Welty] more firmly in her world and . . . disclose the underlying cultural unity" of her Mississippi "chronicle."[2] And well-meaning interviewers have conspired to invent a bland and comfortable Eudora at home on her porch or in her parlor.[3] Almost unfailingly they ask about the importance of place in her fic-

[2]Albert J. Devlin, *Eudora Welty's Chronicle: A Story of Mississippi Life* (Jackson, 1983).
[3] *Conversations with Eudora Welty*, ed. by Peggy Whitman Prenshaw (Jackson, 1984).

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tion, about Mississippi, about her life in Jackson; very few of these itinerant journalists seem to realize how much more of the world she has seen than they. Alice Walker, well-known now as the black feminist author of *Color Me Purple*, apparently knew nothing about Welty in 1973, but—having been born in Jackson too—assumed the worst: "Over the years have you known any black women?" she asked. "Really known them?" Welty's reply was wonderfully mild.

The best responses to Welty's fiction in recent years have come from other writers, notably women who did not grow up in the deep South. Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* (1977) shows just how deep Welty's influence has gone: its black protagonist, Milkman, finds out who he really is when he begins travelling and finding his magical "answers" in music—or in thin air. Morrison is no more defined by Elyria, Ohio, where she was born, than Welty is by Jackson, Mississippi; in fact, Morrison's use of multiple inward voices and her sense of the confluence of identities comprising the self seem direct continuations of Welty's subject. And the style, with its hints of Faulkner and black colloquialism and the Bible, shows its deepest indebtedness to Welty's lyric method; Morrison's voices *sing*.

Another richly responsive reader is Alice Munro, the Canadian short story writer whose *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971) owes its conception and form to *The Golden Apples*. Munro's recent work, collected in *The Moons of Jupiter* (1983), has an increased resonance, partly because she has become interested in the ways her characters wander from their homes in rural Ontario, and then wander back, but partly too because their memories are richer now and echo with music from the past. "Connection" and "Stone in the Field" reverberate with Weltyan harmonies because, I would guess, her protagonists have seen more of the world and bring more to the places they stop in. Currently, Munro seems to be experimenting with an even more autobiographical method, but her style still sounds at times uncannily like this sort of thing from *Losing Battles*:

> *"Gathering home! Gathering home!*
> *Never to sorrow more, never to roam!*
> *Gathering home! Gathering home!*
> *God's children are gathering home!"*
>
> As they sang, the tree over them . . . with its ever-spinning leaves all light-points at this hour, looked bright as a river, and the tables might have been a little train of barges it was carrying with it, moving slowly downstream.

For both writers, the family gathering dramatizes and intensifies the recognition of each person's separate self, ever-spinning and moving downstream.

While Morrison and Munro seem to have listened to the more

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lyrical Welty of *The Wide Net* (1943) and after, Bobbie Ann Mason has learned from the earlier ironic Welty of "Petrified Man" and "Lily Daw and the Three Ladies." Mason's fictional territory is the Paducah-Kentucky Lake region where she was born, although she now lives in Pennsylvania. Her colloquial comedies, full of pawky idiom and twang, are I suspect better for her having come back to them "from away." Mason too puts the subject of staying home versus wandering at the center of her stories. In "Residents and Transients," for example, a woman has an affair with a dull local man while her husband ventures into a new job in Louisville. Uncertain whether to go or stay, she reads up on cats:

> Residents and transients. Some stay put, in their fixed home ranges, and others are on the move. They don't have real homes. Everybody always thought that the ones who establish the territories are the most successful . . . while the transients are the bums, the losers.

But what she has learned is that some scientists now think "it may be that the transients are the superior ones after all, with the greatest curiosity and most intelligence." Mason's character finds no resolution for this Weltyan problem, but she has certainly been looking in the right direction. The lesson all but voiced here is, of course, that human beings by their very nature need to do a certain amount of unescorted roaming.

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CLARA CLAIBORNE PARK

Faith, Grace, and Love

Just look at yourself! Look at your life! Edie glanced, as people will, when told to do that. . . .

Of course the child Abby was exactly in my time of knowing and in all my places of paying attention—the park, the school, our street. . . .

Though the world cannot be changed by talking to one child alone, it may at least be known. . . .

To put us at our ease, to quiet our hearts as she lay dying, our dear friend Selena said. . . .

She actually stood, leaned her big soft excavated body against the kitchen table to make those sandwiches. . . .

It wouldn't help not to be brave, said Selena. You'll see. . . .

When there isn't anything in a story you wouldn't like to quote, you know you're reading one of the rare books that beggars not only description but critical review; the critic's function becomes that humble one too seldom exercised: to point. Look. Did you notice? *Glanced.* It's that verb that does it. Told to look at her life, she *glanced* at it. *Excavated. Soft.* It's cancer, you see, and it wouldn't help not to be brave. It never does, as we will see, if not sooner, later. Later the same day.[1]

Grace Paley seems incapable of associating the commonest words in the simplest sentences without their grabbing a poem's worth of new meanings out of the inner and outer air. Consider, for example, the entire first paragraph of the first story about Faith, who once seemed Paley's heroine; consider it, because latecomers might overlook the fact that Paley is a comic writer. "There were two husbands disappointed by eggs."[2] We might try it Jane Austen's way (and a very good way it was): "It is a truth universally acknowledged that wives exist in order to prepare eggs in a manner agree-

[1] LATER THE SAME DAY, by *Grace Paley.* Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $13.95.
[2] Grace Paley, *The Little Disturbances of Man* (New York, 1959).

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able to their husbands." How true that is. How deeply true. In seven words Paley does it, and fifteen years before the revolution in consciousness we cheapen with the phrase Women's Lib. Or the words she finds to speak of her beloved fahter's failing heart ("Everyone in this book[3] is imagined into life except the father. No matter what story he has to live in, he's my father"). Though the heart is old like him and "will not do certain jobs anymore," it "still floods his head with brainy light." Or the sentence about Faith when her husband has left her, awash in the terrible egotism of misery, and her father tries to catch her eye: "But that is hard to do, for eyes are born dodgers and know a whole circumference of ways out of a bad spot." When writing is rich enough, astonishing enough to evoke the latent inarticulateness of the professionally articulate, it's a renewed reason for gratitude for "this language—wheat and chaff—with its widening pool of foreign genes," for Grace Paley's use of "the beautiful letters of the alphabet invented by smart foreigners long ago to fool time and distance."

But pointing won't do either—one has only to copy down the packed, simple sentences to realize that their surrounding context is the water in which they glow like glass marbles; how can they do it here, beached and dry? For Paley writes no prose for prose's sake, still less for poetry's; the meanings that flood our heads with brainy light are human meanings, relational by their very nature, inextricably textured into our own most valuable, most threatened world. They cry out for context, for the web of fact which Paley's stories, like our lives, provide with random generosity. We need to know more about our Selena if we are to know why she should be dear to us, and Paley needs less than twenty pages to give us enough. We need to know about the child Abby, born into that "expensive moment" in history when the children even of people like us didn't necessarily grow up safe and comfortable but could actually die though they were still young, "murdered by cars, lost to war, to drugs, to madness." Abby "was found in a rooming house in a distant city, dead. The police called. They said, 'Do you have a daughter named Abby?'" The words do it—the terrible three-word sentence, the bald "they said." But though her words are always such that we must notice them, they make sure we do not put them first. Words must fool time and distance, they must give "thickness and strength" to the names of the dead, "so they can fall back into the world with their weight." First comes not the text, but the world ("This world, this world, Ruthy said softly") and the people in it.

So one has to describe after all, to do the reviewer's job, work in bits of summary, tell the facts. This, then, is Grace Paley's third book of stories, collected as *The Little Disturbances of Man, Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*, and now, *Later the Same Day* (each title a

[3] Grace Paley, *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* (New York, 1974).

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glowing marble in the water). They span thirty full years of her time of knowing and of paying attention, and of showing us how we too may attend and know. They comprise not quite 600 pages, neither large nor closely printed. You can read them all—and you have to, since increasingly no one of her stories wants to stand alone. It's ungrateful to deplore the fact that she's written so little, when we can sink so deep into what she has written, and stretch so wide, the depth of a poem, a novel's breadth.

Yet one could argue narrowness. Except for an excursion to China, another to Puerto Rico, and her friends' trip to visit Selena, New York is the only setting. But such a New York! Recognizably our own ("Look at this place, looks like a toxic waste dump. A war"), and yet:

> What a place in democratic time! One God, who was King of the Jews, who unravels the stars to this day with little hydrogen explosions, He can look down from his Holy Headquarters and see us all. . . . He sees south into Brooklyn how Prospect Park lies in its sand-rooted trees among Japanese gardens and police, and beyond us north to dangerous Central Park. Far north, the deer-eyed eland and kudu survive, grazing the open pits of the Bronx Zoo. (*Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*)

Thus some years ago Faith surveyed the city from her tree, fifteen feet up on a fine May morning. The cosmic vision in space and history (one God, who *was* King of the Jews, the final unraveling of the universe, this world itself from Africa and Japan to Brooklyn)—Paley opens it all up with the shimmer of an allusion. She can do it even from the confined locality of bed, where Faith, middle-aged now, would like to conceive another baby to renew the world, "to extract a new person from all-refusing Zeus and jealous Hera. My God, said Jack, you've never mentioned Greek gods in bed before. No occasion, I said."

Our world needs renewing; the planet "is dropping away from us in poisonous disgust," it has become noticeable that "life is short and sorrowful." For that reason the world must be praised; T. S. Eliot, who otherwise has nothing whatever in common with Paley, wrote of "having to construct something upon which to rejoice." Paley too knows which of the seven sins is deadliest: she and her characters are "ideologically, spiritually, and on puritanical principle against despair." It is all the more necessary, then, to praise "our own beloved city crowded with day and night workers, shoppers, walkers, the subway trains which many people fear but they're so handsomely lined with pink to dark brown faces, gold tans and yellows scattered amongst them," because "It's very important to emphasize what is good or beautiful so as not to have a gloomy face when you meet some youngster who has begun to guess." To guess

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that we age and it grows late; the dark strands that were always there in Paley's texture, that kept her love lyrics acridly unsentimental, now cluster as never before. But she will not forsake her station in democratic time, or be disloyal to the colors of her city.

Or to its voices. Paley has the gift of tongues which all-refusing Zeus so seldom vouchsafes to fiction writers. It is a gift, not an acquisition. Henry James and Virginia Woolf didn't have it and didn't want it. Chaucer had it, Forster had it, Joyce had it; so did Flannery O'Connor. Where it exists it is the manifest of a consciousness that thrives on human difference. Paley's ear is unerring for the speech of children, women, and men. She knows a three-year-old doesn't talk like a five-year-old or a fresh nine-year-old like a fresh adolescent. She won't pretend that social classes don't exist in America, or that they sound the same. Her city is loud with voices—Irish, Puerto Rican, black, Jewish, of all degrees of generationality, intellectuality, and education, a continuing festival of difference. Paley's New York is as wide as the world, but it is unshakeable in the specificity of its peopled streets and parks and schools, stores and subways and playgrounds. Not since Dublin has there been such a city. Reinhabiting these stories, I realize at length the uniqueness of this gradually accreting body of work, a uniqueness much more than stylistic. For years now, while our most sophisticated literary voices have spoken for isolation, Paley, second to none in narrative sophistication, has been establishing a subject-matter of neighborhood, of affirmed community, the mingled James Joyce and Jane Jacobs of our time and place.

What community stretches out from is family and friends. Families are everybody's subject-matter. But I do not know another writer who writes so centrally about friendship. The story about Selena and Abby is called "Friends." Faith and Ann and Susan have taken the long train ride to be with Selena; she makes it easy for them to leave so they won't miss the return express. She even makes them sandwiches. They know they won't see her again. They talk about her on the train back. Can a story be about so little? But the story is full, crammed with characters, with names imagined into life in thickness and strength. Besides Faith and Ann and Susan and Selena and Abby, we have Max, Bob Simon and that great guy Bill Dalrymple (both killed in automobile accidents), Matthew, Jeannie, Mike, Al Lurie who was murdered on Sixth Street, the little kid Brenda who O.D.'d on the roof, Artie and Franky and the big surgeon David Clark—these in the first four pages of eighteen, and as many more to come. There are no stories of solitude; all are full of people and names. "Ruthy and Edie" is named from names; it is about a forty-year friendship and a birthday party shadowed by the intractability of politics, the absence of Ruthy's Rachel, who isn't there because history seized her "when her face was still round as an apple" and sent her off to follow her hard conscience. Who

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knows where she is, in Canada or Cuba? The years and places have been full of separations and losses, of discontinuities which neighborhood and friendship must hold together as best they may.

The thirty-year roll-call for these stories would do credit to an epic: Ginny, Mrs. Raftery and her John, darling Kitty Skazka, beautiful Anna Kraat, plain, nice Dottie Wasserman, Ellen who died in a story called "Living" though she was a mother and not old, Phillip Mazzano, Jack son of Jacob, Eddie the butcher, Orlando the grocer, Mrs. Finn, Frederick J. Lorenz, Mr. Wong, Joe Larsen, Faith's Chinese friend Xie Feng—I have scarcely begun. Some are one-time mentions, but most turn up from story to story, as people do turn up in New York, sometimes springing into individuality in a few lines of talk and narrative comment, sometimes with a story of their own. Earlier the same day, though the friends were there, it was parents and sex and children that held the world and the stories together. To some extent they still do, but when parents weaken and children depart and time makes the nuclear family less of a nucleus, Paley turns to friends. And we see that their recurrences have been stabilizing the stories all along, securing beneath the shifts and surprises of stylistic modernity a world almost Trollopian in its trustworthiness. Paley makes us experience it in separate bursts of meaning, but this thirty-year accretion has become a body of work for which the term "stories" can no longer be adequate. *Dubliners* too has a city for a subject, and in *Dubliners* too names recur. But Paley's human texture is thicker, and the Faith stories, growing in the loam of the stories about Ginny and Mrs. Raftery and Dottie Wasserman and Kitty, seem to call on us to call them a novel.

They behaved most traditionally like a novel in *Enormous Changes*, which, though Faith remained outside some of the most brilliant stories, gathered itself around her ironic consciousness and sturdy survivability. We could follow her emergence from "crummy days and crummy guys and no money and broke all the time and cockroaches and nothing to do on Sunday but take the kids to the park and row on that lousy lake" through the May sunshine of Washington Square to the freedom and "steamy energy of middle age." In "The Long-Distance Runner" she leaves her almost-grown boys to get by on "that rotten Celtic supper" Mrs. Raftery makes and jogs to her childhood neighborhood of Coney Island, now devastated but rich with the hopeful black children of the future, and learns from them "as though she was still a child what in the world is coming next." It is the book's last line.

Rereading the stories, it's easy to see that Paley has never encouraged us in the shallow notion that if things are going well for our heroine they are tipping toward sunshine for everybody. But we like thinking that, and though four of the stories in *Enormous Changes* dealt directly and piercingly with death, our minds gravitat-

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ed to the title's assertion of continuing possibility, and the upbeat ending. In *Later the Same Day* things are still going well for Faith—she's with Jack still, the boys are doing ok, she even has a car. Eight of the seventeen stories, and three-quarters of the pages, belong to her in one way or another. But she is no longer the center. "I am trying to curb my cultivated individualism," she begins one story (in which only two proper names distinguish the speaker from Paley herself), individualism "which seemed for years so sweet. It was my own song in my own world, and of course it may not be useful in the hard time to come." It is that individualism that the new stories decisively curb. The reader's commitment to Faith, to her parents, to her children, now young men, need not dissipate, but it must expand, with Faith's, to a wider embrace. The new stories offer even more focuses of attention. Never conventionally organized, they are more discontinuous than ever. Form follows function. Paley has always despised plot, she has told us. And why? "Not for literary reasons, but because it takes all hope away," because it denies the possibility of those enormous changes, because "everyone, real or invented, deserves the open destiny of life." But the lack of plot no longer asks us to believe that everything is possible ("Oh, Pa," I said. "She could change" [*Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*]). We owe it to the young and to ourselves not to put on a gloomy face, but this novel by accretion now makes another statement. It is, as Paley has said elsewhere, not the "I" but the "we" that is important.

Novel? Paley will not present it as such. Loose ends and inconsistencies are left from story to story and volume to volume as if to mock our conviction that her inventions are solider than our wraithlike lives. Why does Arthur Mazzano become Phillip, as he definitely does in Volume Three? Did Faith grow up in Coney Island or the Bronx? The stories are a web, a tapestry, something woven, or embroidered, or a patchwork—feminine handiwork anyway, extensive enough that irregularities don't matter and threads and bits and snippets in all colors can be greeted and made welcome.

The form for such an entertainment will not be linear. In the same story in which she repudiates individualism (in the most individual of voices) Faith—Paley—identifies the habit of beginning a story at the beginning as something men love and do. Middles, she implies, are for the untidy world of women, whose work and webs are never done. It is in middles that life is woven close. Paley's work will take its meanings, not from a beginning artificially charged with the significance of a climactic ending, but from the daily, seemingly inconsequential maintenance-work of the enduring and expanding middle. Paley was found some years ago with friends from the Women's Peace Center occluding entrance to the Pentagon with skeins of bright wool. Of course.

It is that sense of the web, of women's values, that infuses Faith's

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late-night rendition of the story of Sarah, who had a baby in old age—the story that, read "with interlinear intelligence," ends "with those three monotheistic horsemen . . . Christianity, Judaism, and Islam."

> Just the same, I said to softly snoring Jack, before all that popular badness wedged its way into the world, there *was first* the little baby Isaac . . . looking at Sarah just like all our own old babies—remember the way they practiced their five little senses. Oh, Jack, that Isaac, Sarah's boy—before he was old enough to be taken out by his father to get his throat cut, he must have just lain around smiling and making up diphthongs and listening, and the women sang songs to him and wrapped him up in such pretty rugs.

Such pretty woven rugs. By his father to get his throat cut. What more need be said about patriarchy than that?

The stories' feminist texture, then, is strengthening; in the very last one a Lesbian friend complains, "You've told everybody's story but mine," and Faith—Grace—implies a promise to work in that strand too. The mode of weaving, embroidery, patchwork, is inclusion, not exclusion. For that reason we should not see this as a woman-centered world where men enter only as neglectful dads and stuck-up though seductive studs. Some of the finest voices belong to men—the old father of "Faith in the Afternoon," brainy light still shining, who has here his own heart-rendingly beautiful story, "Dreamer in a Dead Language"; the black janitor who tells the terrible story of the rape and murder of "The Little Girl" (*Enormous Changes at the Last Minute*). And Jack speaks too, and Phillip and Joe and Nick and Mr. Wong and the rest of them, each with the uniqueness accorded him by his creator's affection and respect. Most remarkably, there is the story "Zagrowsky Tells," in which for the first time we see Faith not as observer but observed. Faith and her friends picketed Zagrowsky because "Zagrowsky Is a Racist," though he'd never refused to bring them penicillin up four flights of stairs when the kids were sick at midnight. How could they know they would precipitate the near destruction of a family, such terrible pain? Zagrowsky shows us another Faith, self-righteous, certain, unintentionally but willingly merciless. "Faith, I still can't figure out why you girls were so rotten to me." "But we were right." Zagrowsky names the condition: "This lady Queen of Right"—rightness, the occupational disease of people of good will trying to be responsibly active in this place in democratic time. Yet poor Iz *was* a racist; they *were* right, and his pathetic mad daughter has given him a dark brown grandson to prove the warmth of their rightness amid its chill, another child to renew the world, his cherished Emmanuel, "the smartest boy in kindergarten," his "little best friend."

The intractability of politics shadows this book as never before,

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not only the anxiety of annihilation, but the ugly ambiguities which did not arise when it was so simply right to oppose the war. "Why did China recognize Pinochet just about ten minutes after the coup in Chile?" "You three lead such adversarial lives," says Edie, who teaches children and has more direct interventions to perform. Politics unites friends and divides them. There's the morning when the narrator (this time it really is Paley) sees "a fine-looking woman named Margaret, who hadn't spoken to me in two years."

> We'd had many years of political agreement before some matters relating to the Soviet Union separated us. In the angry months during which we were both right in many ways, she took away with her to her political position and daily friendship my own best friend, Louise—my lifelong park, P.T.A., and antiwar movement sister, Louise.

But the storyteller sees "Margaret's good face, and before I remembered our serious difference, I smiled." Margaret smiles back, and "so foolish is the true lover when responded to that I took her hand as we passed, bent to it, pressed it to my cheek, and touched it with my lips." Because friendship, finally, is what it's all about, and if politics doesn't know that, it doesn't know anything. The story opens *Later the Same Day*. It is called "Love."

These books will help to repudiate that new *trahison des clercs*, those high-rise theories that try to persuade us we're naive to think about people in stories as if they were real. To merge the real and the invented is one of Paley's most attractive games. In "Love," her husband insists that he used to go out with Dottie Wasserman, and when she tells him Dottie's a character in a book, "just plain invented in the late fifties," he pays no attention. That's how securely Paley's people are imagined into life, woven, confected out of love and memory, invented as "the life-long past is invented, which, as we know, thickens the present and gives all kinds of advice to the future."

You can read these stories over and over, until you know bits of them by heart, just like a poem. You can absorb the characters into your life, just like a novel. You can cry over them, as I did more than once, writing this review. For Christ's sake, you can even *study* them. Grace Paley is better than anybody we've got. She has been for years and years, and now, finally (a page in *Time*, two in *PW*, a film), it's plain for all to see. Philip Larkin thinks "a short story should be either a poem or a novel." I will call these stories both—heirlooms of our moment, beautiful, permanently made things.

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MICHAEL GORRA

The Lesson of Henry James

AS HE BEGAN TO WORK ON THE PREFACES for the New York edition of his works, Henry James paused to write a 1907 essay on *The Tempest*, in which he pondered the seemingly perfect separation in Shakespeare between what T. S. Eliot would later call "the man who suffers and the mind which creates." What connection was there, James asked, between "the monster and magician of a thousand masks," and the glovemaker's son from Stratford, who after writing that last play seemingly did not miss "the key of his piano, as I have called it, since he could play so freely with the key of his cash-box."? And yet, James added, the split between them "exists only in the vision of those able to content themselves with arbitrary marks"—or only for those unwilling to accept Shakespeare's final elusiveness, unwilling to accept that this "human character the most magnificently endowed, in all time, with the sense of the life of man" has conspired with history to tell us "nothing of the effect on him of being *able* to write Lear and Othello." What was it like, James wonders, to *be* Shakespeare? And that question, to which he can find no answer, seems all the more pressing for him as he prepares, in the prefaces that were to constitute an *apologia* for his own creative life, to tell the world what it was like to be Henry James.

One of the pleasures in reading these splendidly indexed and organized volumes,[1] the first complete edition of his criticism, lies in watching James discover what it is to possess his own particular "magnificently endowed" mind, watching him, not just in those retrospective prefaces, but even in his earlier book reviews, learn the shape of his own sensibility and forge the aesthetic that grows from it. So while in 1865 he praised Trollope for having in *Miss MacKenzie* had the courage to take as his heroine not a sweetly attractive maiden, but a plain and not very intelligent middle-aged spinster, he attacked it, as he would later attack *Madame Bovary*, because Miss Mackenzie's drab ordinariness meant that to him the growth of her "affections would not, in actual life, be a phenomenon worthy of an intelligent spectator." So too in 1873 he recognized *Middlemarch*'s greatness, but wished, even at the sacrifice of "many of the best

[1] HENRY JAMES: ESSAYS, AMERICAN & ENGLISH WRITERS, ed. by *Leon Edel* with *Mark Wilson*. The Library of America. $27.50. HENRY JAMES: EUROPEAN WRITERS AND THE PREFACES, ed. by *Leon Edel* with *Mark Wilson*. The Library of America. $27.50.

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things in the book," that Eliot had made the novel more "compact," had fastened more completely upon Dorothea Brooke than upon the world of which she is but one part. Fineness of material, concentration of form—the two principles, adumbrated in essay after essay, that represented for him what he called the "compromise with reality which is the basis of all imaginative writing." In his own fiction those principles first coalesced, as he describes in the preface to *The Portrait of a Lady*, in his creation in that novel of the first of what he called his "supersubtle fry." In Isabel Archer's consciousness he found both his subject and his form—found them both in the history of what he called "her relation to herself," that enabled him to make the novel not merely a sprawling Eliotic representation of life, but an Aristotelian representation of a coherent action, of the process through which she comes to understand her own situation.

Yet in making her affront "her destiny," one question remained for James: that of the limits of the "ado" he was "organizing" about her. How, that is, to make the novel end, and so achieve that final concentration of form? For as he wrote in the preface to *Roderick Hudson*:

> Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily *appear* to do so. He is in the perpetual predicament that the continuity of things is the whole matter, for him, of comedy and tragedy; that this continuity is never, by the space of an instant or an inch, broken, and that, to do anything at all, he has at once intensely to consult and intensely to ignore it.

James wrote of Trollope's "love of a comfortable ending," but he had no such love himself, for to him such endings violated the fact that "relations stop nowhere," drew a circle without implying that inescapable continuity. Instead he brings Isabel's consciousness to the point at which both her sense, and ours, of her next step is most closely circumscribed by what has come before, to the point at which only one thing can happen. He stops, that is, just before Isabel goes back to her husband, Gilbert Osmond, leaving her on the brink of that excruciating trip from London to Rome, so that in reading we know what happens next, and yet not the next event but one. For after she returns to Osmond the possibilities for action open up again, and the future is various. That open ending (whose lessons one sees in the structurally similar conclusions of *The Wings of the Dove* and *The Golden Bowl*) makes the *Portrait* both true to life and true to its form. It both implies the nightmarish continuity of the relations James describes, and draws a circle around them, so that, as he wrote in his preface to it, the novel "strains, or tends to burst, with a latent extravagance, its mould," without ever quite do-

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ing so. In consequence Isabel seems to live outside and after the novel far more completely than do the characters Eliot or Dickens so neatly dispose of in their last chapters. James's intense concentration upon form doesn't shut the novel off from life, but opens the novel to it.

Or so at least it would seem to a thorough Jamesian. And yet the question remains: what does James's criticism have to say about the novel as a genre, as opposed either to his own novels, or to the modern novel that his criticism, as much as his fiction, helped to create? For what he called the "paradise of loose ends" of which the Victorian novel consists is itself, as George Levine has persuasively argued (*The Realistic Imagination*, University of Chicago Press, 1981), an attempt to make form answer to the "continuity" of life, another and even more extravagant way of straining the novel's "mould" and so indicating the life that lies outside it. In asking, in the preface to *The Tragic Muse*, "what do such large loose baggy monsters, with their queer elements of the accidental and the arbitrary, artistically *mean*," James ignored the obvious answer that, like his own novels, they mean what their form implies. Nothing makes his incomprehension of that form more clear than an essay he paradoxically wrote not about fiction, but about poetry, his magisterially misguided 1912 essay on Browning, "The Novel in *The Ring and the Book*." There he re-imagines Browning's triumph of the multiple point-of-view as one of his own late novels, making the young priest Caponsacchi function as a center of consciousness, like Strether in *The Ambassadors*, through whom everything can be presented to us—a re-imagination that gives the poem a spurious intensity at the expense of the polyphonic autonomy of the voices Browning creates, at the sacrifice of all Browning's own swarming Shakesperian "sense of the life of man." *The Ring and the Book* may be a verse novel. But it could never have been one by James, for he never fully understood the Victorian novel to which it is related, never understood the degree to which its multi-plotted aesthetic, growing from a sense of the complex relations of a densely populated community, dull Miss Mackenzies and all, differed from but was no less valid than his own American concentration upon a solitary subject, an Isabel Archer, in the process of creating herself.

Yet certainly the passage I've quoted above about what we're now taught to call the "problematic of closure" remains valuable; helps even when matched against an essentially different type of novel, like Trollope's *Phineas Finn*, to clarify our understanding of its structure. Even James's plea that novelists value their calling highly enough to choose no subjects but the best, no material but the finest, finally no characters but the most intelligent, has its point. For to James that fineness, and so the novel's subject, lies not in the world but in the consciousness that plays over it, and that distinction allowed him, from the start of his career, to repudiate what he called "the dull dispute over the 'immoral' subject" and insist that

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the genre hold nothing alien. To him intelligence created morality as beauty creates truth, and so a novel's morality lay only in "the amount of felt life concerned in producing it," in the authenticity with which the discriminating consciousness captures an experience.

One of the chief pleasures one takes in these volumes, in fact, comes from watching the progress of James's long battle with Victorian puritanism. He wanted to bring to the English novel the French acknowledgement of the sexual life as a motive force, and so destroy what in "The Art of Fiction" he called the "traditional difference between that which people . . . feel to be a part of life and that which they allow to enter into literature." Such "moral timidity" on behalf of "'young people'"—Podsnapperingly always female—enraged him, for as he wrote in "The Future of the Novel," his 1899 account of the genre's loss of vitality, "The form of novel that is stupid on the general question of its freedom is the single form that may, *a priori*, be unhesitatingly pronounced wrong." And in his sense of the dangers that lay in an essentially unconventional form's accession to convention, he made this prediction:

> It would be curious—really a great comedy—if the renewal were to spring just from the satiety of the very readers for whom the sacrifices have hitherto been supposed to be made. It bears on this that as nothing is more salient in English life today, to fresh eyes, than the revolution taking place in the position and outlook of women—and taking place much more deeply in the quiet than even the noise on the surface demonstrates—so we may very well yet see the female elbow itself, kept in increasing activity by the play of the pen, smash with final resonance the window all this time most superstitiously closed. The particular draught that has been most deprecated will in that case take care of the question of freshness. It is the opinion of some observers that when women do obtain a free hand they will not repay their long debt to the precautionary attitude of men by unlimited consideration for the natural delicacy of the latter.

In his earlier criticism James too often relied upon a stereotypical distinction between male rationality and female impressionism. But by the turn of the century he knew better, and this liberating if typically labyrinthine irony predicts not just Virginia Woolf's longing in "Professions for Women" to tell "the truth about my own experiences as a body," but the work of Doris Lessing and the resonantly smashed window of today.

But James fought the philistines as well as the puritans. "The Future of the Novel" grows out of his own bitter awareness of that then-deepening rift between the novel as a popular genre and the novel as art—an awareness of the degree to which he himself could no longer hope for the popular success he craved in an age when

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fiction was becoming a commodity. In future, he wrote, the commercially successful novel would cater to the fact that:

> . . . man combines with his eternal desire for more experience an infinite cunning as to getting his experience as cheaply as possible . . . He likes to live the life of others, yet is well aware of the points at which it may too intolerably resemble his own. The vivid fable, more than anything else, gives him this satisfaction on easy terms, gives him knowledge abundant yet vicarious.

James had earlier found and condemned the "cheaply . . . vicarious thrills" offered by such a meretricious realism in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's lurid 1860s thriller, *Lady Audley's Secret*, a novel written "at any hazard to make a hit." What would he have made of Ian Fleming or Barbara Cartland? No wonder, then, that after providing a lesson on how the thinking reader ought to experience *What Maisie Knew*, James concluded his preface to it with the half-despairing admission that "I shouldn't really go on as if this were the case with many readers." But James's shrewd acuity about the novel's relation to its audience ought to make "The Future of the Novel" accessible even to the "many readers" whom one can't imagine getting on with *What Maisie Knew*.

Some of his best essays, however, are not so accessible, for they are like his own late novels in that the more one knows about novels and the criticism of them, the richer and more suggestive they seem. For me the finest of them is the 1905 "The Lesson of Balzac," a lesson which, taught by the novelist whom James calls "the father of us all . . . a figure more extraordinary than any he drew" is nothing less than a reminder of the possibilities of the novel itself. And James's own lesson, in this densely allusive celebration of Balzac's genius, lies in providing a virtual list of all the things the novelist can do and the problems he or she faces in doing them. On Balzac's success with the novel of ideas:

> His plan was to handle, primarily, not a world of ideas, animated by figures representing those ideas; but the packed and constituted, the palpable, proveable world before him, by the study of which ideas would inevitably find themselves thrown up.

And so on, through pages that outline the realist's love of his characters, his "joy in their communicated and exhibited movement"; the individualism at the heart of the nineteenth-century novel, its insistence on "it being the greatest adventure of all, I verily think, just to *be* you"; on the limitations of dialogue as a structural principle; on how to handle the passage of time; on both realism's relation to the quotidian world and its equally necessary voraciousness; even on the characteristic "weather" of various writers, the "endless

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autumn" of Charlotte Brontë and the "arrested spring" of Austen. "The Lesson of Balzac" tells me more about the novel as a genre than any other twenty-five pages I know—tells more than any twenty-five volumes, except that it is so tightly packed that fully to assess its implications would require one to have read those volumes first.

Yet the James who wrote with such generosity of Balzac in 1905 had as a young man in 1875 written of him that "Each particular episode of the 'Comédie Humaine' has its own hero and heroine but the great general protagonist is the twenty-franc piece." James's early criticism is as memorably pungent as his later is measured and calm. If the 1875 essay says less than "The Lesson of Balzac" about the novel as a genre, it does say every bit as much about Balzac's gaudy glory in particular, and provides as well a hint of the novel's relation to capitalism that the later James did not explore. Both essays—both styles of observation—are essential, and I'm glad that the exigencies of his pocketbook made the young James sharpen his tongue on the 150-odd book reviews he wrote in the first dozen years of his career. Nobody ever handled bad bestsellers so well as the young James—so well, or with so sure a knowledge of their attractions, writing of Ouida, for example, that while "we are fastidious . . . we are tempted to wish we were not, so that we might innocently swallow her down and think her as magnificent as she pretends to be."

James missed some of his opportunities. He turned down a request to write on Tolstoy, he never did full justice to Dickens, and never even looked at Melville. He never seems to have discovered Chekhov, whom one imagines he would have liked, and only gave a few admiring pages to Wharton in "The New Novel," pages that suggest an essay one misses all the more because it seems such a natural, such a possible, one for him to have written. Yet after all one can say against James as a critic, this remains: no nineteenth-century writer had a wider experience of the novel as an international form, or has left us so much of what he knew about it; no significant novelist has had a broader, or a more generally sure taste; and no novelist has left such a large and systematic group of writings on his art. In telling us not just about the conditions of his own creation but about the genre as a whole, that body of work not only provided the novel with its first, and still most important, critical touchstones, but rivals and perhaps surpasses the legacies of the great English poet-critics: Dryden's essays, Johnson's *Lives*, Coleridge's commentary on Shakespeare.

In that essay on *The Tempest* with which I began, James describes Shakespeare, at work upon his last play, as a

> divine musician who, alone in his room, preludes or improvises at close of day. He sits at the harpsichord, by the open window, in the summer dusk; his hands wander over the keys. They stray

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> far, for his motive, but at last he finds and holds it, then he lets himself go, embroidering and refining . . . The neighbours may gather in the garden, the nightingale be hushed on the bough; it is none the less a private occasion, a concert of one, both performer and auditor, who plays for his own ear, his own hand, his own innermost sense, and for the bliss and capacity of his instrument. Such are the only hours at which the artist *may* . . . and their challenge to him is irresistible if he has known, all along, too much compromise and too much sacrifice.

Such, perhaps, was what it was finally like to be Henry James, at work for himself alone on those last great novels, ignoring in the end those who want their experience "as cheaply as possible," to play upon "his own innermost sense" of what the novel could achieve. Such too is what it was like to be James at work upon the Prefaces that are his last great achievement, the last part of that long critical conversation with himself to which these volumes allow us, like Shakespeare's neighbors, to listen.

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JAY PARINI

The Question of George Steiner

GEORGE STEINER IS NEVER BORING, and this alone puts his work in a class above most critics. Though plagued with inaccuracies, overly general statements, and pompous asides, his diverse writings on European literature and culture often seem incisive and intensely moral, as if the survival of value itself were at stake. Steiner writes passionately, as a Jew, with a firm sense of what it means to write after the Nazi Holocaust, in (as he calls it) a "post-culture." The central question that he has asked, in nearly a dozen books, is this: How was it possible for the Nazi killers to spend their days murdering innocent people while their evenings were spent reading Rilke and listening to Schubert? In effect, Steiner is asking what relationship, if any, exists between literature and morality?

In an early, controversial essay (collected in the new Steiner *Reader*[1]) called "To Civilize our Gentlemen," Steiner framed the question starkly:

> In I. A. Richards's *Practical Criticism* we find the following: "The question of belief or disbelief, in the intellectual sense, never arises when we are reading well. If unfortunately it does arise, either through the poet's fault or our own, we have for the moment ceased to be reading and have become astronomers, or theologians, or moralists, persons engaged in quite a different type of activity." To which the answer should be: No, we have become men.

Steiner, here as elsewhere, insists that great literature *must* be read urgently, as if it had designs upon us. He recalls Kafka's famous remark: "A book must be an ice-axe to break the sea frozen inside us." Needless to say, this approach—radically moral, Tolstoyan in its insistence that the reader should feel and respond to a writer's moral imperatives—has been unpopular in Cambridge, England, where Steiner has taught, off and on, for many years.

There is, of course, something hopeless about Steiner's (and Tolstoy's) approach to art. It leads, inevitably, to despair, since the readership of any given text is likely to vary wildly, even more so in these so-called "post-literate" days. *In Bluebeard's Castle* (1971) repre-

[1] GEORGE STEINER: A READER. Oxford University Press. $25.00.

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sents Steiner's own point of ultimate despair. "We have seen something of the collapse of hierarchies and of the radical changes in the value-systems which relate personal creation with death. These mutations have brought an end to classic literacy. . . . The major part of western culture, which has been for two thousand years and more so deliberately interactive, the work echoing, mirroring, alluding to, previous works in the tradition, is now passing quickly out of reach." It is chilling and, oddly, exhilarating to read about the demise of literacy: one imagines the world in collapse, with only a few of us left who know anything about the Bible and Homer and Shakespeare. Steiner, in this particularly stirring jeremiad, one of many he has written, asserts that "the unbroken arc of English poetry, of reciprocal discourse that relates Chaucer and Spenser to Tennyson and to Eliot, is fading rapidly from the reach of natural reading." The reactionary curmudgeon in us all races to agree, and there's enough truth in this assertion to drop the emotional atmosphere in any decent library by quite a few points of the thermometer. Nonetheless, what Steiner says is only partially true. The sheer number of people in the English-speaking world who can relate Chaucer and Spenser to Tennyson or Eliot is probably much higher now than ever before in the history of man. Was there ever such a thing as Steiner's "natural" reader, who had immediate commerce with numerous periods and languages? I doubt it. Not even Shakespeare laid claim to more than a little Latin. And his Greek, like most of ours, was . . . unspeakable.

Steiner is, in many ways, his own worst enemy. He has an important point to make about the loss of connections between language and action. And there is an argument to be made that the New Criticism, with its insistence on the autonomy of art, has eroded the moral impact of art on society. I doubt that there has ever been, or could be, a direct correlation between the "greatness" of a literary text and its measurable "impact" on social values; nonetheless, one can expect a real work of art to effect some sort of change in the individual reader, however subtle and unmeasurable. (No critic has yet improved upon Horace, when he said that the artist's ideal was to instruct, entertain, and move his audience.) One only wishes that Steiner were able to make his points with fewer drums and trumpets. By perpetually casting himself in the role of *vox clamantis in deserto,* he—paradoxically—makes it hard for us to take him seriously.

Steiner is also plagued with stylistic problems. He grew up, as he says (rather too often), "at home in three languages." He claims that one of these was English; nevertheless, his prose often sounds like a bad translation from the Hungarian. In the introductory essay to his new *Reader* he writes: "How can scholarship and criticism be divorced from the crisis of the humane without, by this very divorcement being reduced to academic trivia?" Surely "divorcement" is a sorry way to pump up "divorce"? And why resort to "the humane

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without"—an awkward circumlocution? Steiner is never terribly obscure, yet his prose is ungainly, often wistfully vague. He can be wonderfully suggestive at times, even hauntingly so, but he achieves this effect too often at the expense of a clear prose style. He also tends to strong-arm readers with endless references and allusions. In his fairly recent essay (1979), " 'Critic' / 'Reader' "—a call for fewer "programs in creative criticism" and more "houses of and for reading"—Steiner concludes a lucid piece of culture criticism with the following ridiculous paragraph:

> "Great Readers," says Borges, who is himself one, are "rarer than great writers." The list would include Montaigne reading Seneca and re-reading himself; Coleridge reading Jacobi and Schelling, a reading whose motion of acquiescence and metamorphic repossession Thomas McFarland has analysed with a tact equalling that of any other study of the stress of influence; Péguy reading Corneille and Victor Hugo; Walter Benjamin reading Goethe's *Elective Affinities;* Heidegger reading Sophocles and Trakl (not Hölderlin, whom he often reads wilfully and with opportunism); Mandelstam reading Dante and Chénier; Alexandre Koyré reading Galileo; Nabokov reading (not translating) Pushkin; Jean Starobinski reading Rousseau; William Empson reading complex words; Gianfranco Contini reading the Provençal poets, Dante, and Montale; Pierre Boutang reading Plato's *Philebus*; Michael Dummett reading Frege, where depth and openness of reading are radically creative; D. S. Carne-Ross reading Gongora and Aristo; Gershom Scholem reading Kabbalists and reading Walter Benjamin . . .

The point of this ludicrous catalogue is not, alas, substantiation; Steiner is saying, covertly: "Hey, I'll bet you didn't even *know* that somebody called Alexander Koyré performed an exacting study of Galileo. What about Gianfranco Contini? Or Jean Starobinski? How can you doubt my main argument if you can't even keep up with the All-Stars?"

This kind of coercion puts readers in a bad mood. Synecdochists all, we dismiss the whole because the part seems specious. In dismissing all of Steiner, however, we miss a great deal that is worthwhile, for in spite of himself, he is an important voice in contemporary criticism, if only because of the range of his connection and the crucial moral issues which he, however badly, raises. The virtues of Steiner were most obviously apparent in his early essays, collected in *Language and Silence* (1967); in that volume, Steiner meditates sensibly on topics ranging from Sylvia Plath to Thomas Mann and Georg Lukacs. (The new *Reader* unfortunately omits "Homer and the Scholars" and "Literature and Post-History," two of Steiner's most penetrating essays.)

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The earliest full-length book by Steiner was *Tolstoy or Dostoevsky: An Essay in Contrast* (1959). The fact that he didn't know a word of Russian did not stand in Steiner's way, trilingual as he was, in starting off his career with a study of the two greatest Russian writers. *Hubris*? Probably. The book is weirdly conceived of as being exemplary of the Old Criticism as opposed to the New. Even as a sapling, Steiner was determined to overshadow his contemporaries. He imagined that by including certain biographical and cultural data, he was somehow going beyond the current style of criticism by retreating to an earlier era. The truth is, when Steiner is talking directly about specific works, he does so cogently, even suggestively, given the limitation that he doesn't know any Russian. But the book is digressive and, though fascinating in parts, exhausting (still not "boring") rather than exhaustive. Steiner is endlessly defensive, showing off his knowledge of Flaubert, James, and dozens of other major and minor writers. The New Criticism that he attacks is a straw figure, easily knocked down by the hypothetical Old Criticism he sets up. Steiner's unfortunate tone is struck in the book's first footnote: "All dates that refer to the lives and works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky are given in the Old Style—i.e., twelve days earlier than Western European dates." Doomed from the start.

Steiner has wisely preferred the essay-length study, where suggestiveness alone will often carry the day. Among his essay collections, *Extraterritorial* (1971) seems least successful. Apart from several unconvincing forays into generative and structural linguistics, the book contains some intriguing but, finally, wrong-headed studies of Borges, Nabokov, and Beckett. What these writers have in common is an aura of "unhousedness." Each is, in a way, an exile, literally or figuratively, at home in more than one language. Steiner, as cultural critic, surveys the loss of localized cultures, including the destruction of one branch of Judaic culture, and reports bleakly on the prospects for literature to take root in such waste places. He is unquestionably right about much of this. The world has become less particularized, something of a "global village." But he is wrong to imagine that the only appropriate response to the levelling hand of the modern *Zeitgeist* is to embrace it, to become "unhoused" oneself. Oddly enough, what remains best in Beckett is his Irishness, in Borges his Argentine and English roots (his maternal grandmother was English), in Nabokov his dogged Russianness. The best writers still tend to seek "a local habitation and a name." This bias against what Steiner sees as parochialism vitiates some of his best practical criticism.

After Babel (1975) is, by far, Steiner's most ambitious project to date. In this book, he attempts to create an overall grammar of translation that subsumes most of the themes raised in earlier work. But there is little in the way of a sustained argument in *After Babel*; instead, one finds a series of interesting, if disconnected, specula-

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tions on the nature of translation, on linguistics (Chomsky recurs throughout the book as a negative counterpoint, someone to argue with; in essence, Steiner argues that universalist theories, such as Chomsky's, are incapable of dealing with the minute particulars of literary language), on individual texts—especially Dante. The familiar Steiner rumblings about the decline in "real" literacy are present throughout, a kind of base line music against which the main topics play off their various melodies. *After Babel* is an essay-collection in disguise. Read as such, it remains a compelling book. The new *Reader* extracts several discrete pieces, such as "Speech as Translation," a subtle commentary on regional and class dialects and how they can be used as "instruments of ironic exclusion." Steiner, the perpetual outsider, tracks the politics of discrimination with an obsessive eye. "Upper-class English diction," he asserts, "communicates from above, enmeshing the actual unit of information, often imperative or conventionally benevolent, in a network of superfluous linguistic matter." Though Steiner's comments remain unsystematic throughout, his accumulated insights on the process of translation *within* a specific language are original and certainly warrant further inquiry.

Steiner has several axes to grind, and he grinds them repeatedly in successive books and essays. *On Difficulty* (1978) catches the spillover from *After Babel.* In these eight essays, Steiner once again argues (asserts, perhaps, is more like what really happens) that all communication involves "translation" in some sense. He picks up several lines of inquiry from *After Babel*: the centrality of Dante for Western culture, the negative influence of explicit sexual descriptions in literature, the preference for Whorfian (relativistic) over Chomskyan (universalist) linguistics, and the general substitution of "semi-attentive reading" for "full" reading that has turned our century into a cultural wasteland. In general, I prefer these essays to their previous incarnations in *After Babel.* Steiner separates his thought into recognizable strands here; he follows these strands rather neatly. He writes with force and, for him, with what almost amounts to clarity. "Eros and Idiom," also collected in the *Reader*, is perhaps Steiner's finest essay, a subtle inquiry into the use and abuse of sexual imagery and depiction in European fiction of the past two centuries. The essay amounts to a defense of subtlety itself, of understatement and silence. "What is at stake is the education, the quickening of human feelings as against their diminution through simplification and brutality."

Steiner's most recent book is *Antigones* (1984)[2] (forgive the philological absurdity of the title), a book-length study of the Antigone legend in Western literature, art, and thought. His basic concern is to locate the staying power of this particular legend in its universali-

[2]ANTIGONES, by *George Steiner.* Oxford University Press. $29.95.

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ty, and he does this by tracing its various "re-experiencings" by innumerable later artists and critics, ranging from Hegel, Kierkegaard, Hölderlin to Fugard and others. *Antigones* is, in some ways, Steiner's most sustained and successful piece of work. He has always found tragedy the most compelling form that art can take, and he has previously dealt with the subject at book-length, in *The Death of Tragedy* (1961). That book, which derives its title and rhetorical posture (alas) from Nietzsche, argues that tragedy—as a genre—survives in its purest forms only in cultures (such as ancient Greece) that approach life from a mytho-poetical and sacramental viewpoint. Modern, i.e. post-seventeenth century, life has been debased by science, commercialism, positivism, and mass culture; hence, tragedy has been unable to thrive. Steiner excepts Brecht, Chekhov, Ibsen and other modern writers who happen to please him, but trundles on to a gloomy conclusion, pronouncing tragedy dead. This early book is full of contradictions, distortions, and unfounded generalizations. One example will have to suffice to prove my point: Western drama declined, says Steiner, when playwrights were no longer able to write in verse. Verse was, is, the only language adequate to tragedy in its purest form. He cites the rise of the novel in the nineteenth century, pointing out (as have others, of course) that the novel's ascendency is coincident with dramatic literature's demise. As if forgetting his main argument, he later suggests that Lear's best moments are those when he speaks in prose. He also says that *Faust* fails when Goethe tries to write in verse, and that it would have succeeded had its author stuck to prose. And so on. It is hard to treat a book seriously, however learned, that abounds in obvious, surface contradictions. *Antigones* is much more consistent in its presentation. Steiner refrains from the grand generalizations that crop up everywhere in the earlier book; he keeps his focus on the Antigone myth itself, in its various manifestations. At the center of the book is a forty-five-page analysis of several famous confrontations between Creon and Antigone. In these scenes, Steiner discovers "all the principal constants of conflict in the condition of man." Age versus youth, society versus the individual, man versus woman. Everything is here. Spinning off the "one literary text"—that of Sophocles' play—Steiner exhumes endless famous and forgotten "versions" of the Antigone myth, such as Kierkegaard's "Antigone excursus" in the first part of *Either/Or* or Hölderlin's weird take-off on the Sophoclean text. Somewhat like Hölderlin, Steiner seems—ultimately—less interested in Sophocles' *Antigone* than he is in going behind (or, as Freud would have it, below) the Sophoclean text to the mytho-poetic and psychological sources of this legend. In a fascinating turn, he explores the possible relationships between grammar and the mytho-poetic consciousness itself, citing the Narcissus myth as a parallel to the development of the first person as a grammatical concept. Every chapter of *Antigones* is dense and sug-

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gestive, and one hopes Steiner will probe further into this vein of inquiry.

In all, Steiner remains an impressive—if uneven—critic. He has written well and badly, often within the same piece of criticism. His infamous novel, *The Portage to San Cristobál of A.H.* (1979), is beyond the scope of this essay, though chapters of it appear in the Steiner *Reader*. (Its readers divide almost evenly between those who find it unreadable and those who think Steiner has achieved something unique and valuable.) The point is that Steiner, as a critic, has seen fit to raise difficult, often painful, matters. His explorations of the nature of translation have been consistently interesting, if unsystematic. And he has, with his huge reach, challenged critics who, for whatever reasons, refuse to look beyond the narrow world of Anglo-Saxon culture. Steiner's jeremiads on the loss of an audience capable of "full" readings of great texts can only urge us, as co-readers, toward a re-engagement with the source materials of Western civilization.

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ROBERT LEITER

The Poetry Competition

OVER THE COURSE OF THE LAST DECADE, Delmore Schwartz has become the literary world's paradigm for the doomed poet. The canonization began gradually, as Schwartz's friends and acquaintances, most of them associated in some way or another with *Partisan Review,* wrote about him in various articles, reviews and memoirs. The process gathered steam with the publication of Saul Bellow's novel, *Humboldt's Gift,* in which Schwartz appears, thinly disguised, as the tormented, buffoonish poet Von Humboldt Fleisher; and it may well have reached its apotheosis in 1977 with the attention and praise that greeted James Atlas' authorized biography of Schwartz. Since then, other texts have been added to the record, the most significant being William Barrett's *The Truants* and William Phillips' *A Partisan View,* both of which challenged the prevailing notion that Schwartz was the *poète maudit* (genus American) of the twentieth century.

Now we are being offered a volume of Schwartz's letters, selected and edited by the poet Robert Phillips,[1] who became Schwartz's literary executor after the death of Dwight Macdonald; and if we are to believe the poets and writers quoted on the book's dust jacket—among them Richard Wilbur, Robert Gorham Davis and Karl Shapiro—this correspondence will, once and for all, lift the mantle of the cursed and misunderstood poet from Schwartz's shoulders. Rather than "the failed, stricken, self-destructive genius" of the novels and reminiscences, we shall discover in these pages a Delmore Schwartz "full of high jinks and high seriousness," someone "witty, concise, spontaneous," whose only devotion was to literature itself.

The letters *do* tilt the evidence in favor of those who long for a less mythologized legacy for Schwartz, but they achieve this goal in ways far different than Wilbur and Davis would have us believe; for when one insists upon a more "human" portrait of Schwartz, the end result is by no means attractive. Reading this book is a dismally claustrophobic, wearying affair, and not simply because the life depicted in its pages is leaden with sorrows—insomnia, alcoholism, madness. The problem is a good deal more complex. As a young man, Schwartz wrote a certifiable masterpiece, the astonishing short

[1]THE LETTERS OF DELMORE SCHWARTZ, selected and edited by *Robert Phillips.* Ontario Review Press. $24.95.

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story "In Dreams Begin Responsibilities," which continues to speak to us today. There he explored his most important theme. According to the critic Harry Levin, Schwartz "reversed the happy ending of the immigrant legend; instead of joining a transatlantic utopia, the eternal wanderers got lost in a deeper and darker wilderness . . ." And then wreaked havoc upon their American children.

For the rest of his brief life—he died of a heart attack at the age of 53, alone and lonely in a fleabag Manhattan hotel, as much a victim of his paranoia as of ill health—Schwartz wrote variations on this one story, with less and less technical expertise each time out. Why he thought anyone would care to hear about his life again and again, especially in the case of his 200-page poem, *Genesis,* which manages to take its hero, Hershey Green, only as far as his seventh birthday, remains one of the mysteries of Schwartz's life. Still, he persisted in tilling the same forbiddingly narrow patch of literary ground, until everything he wrote sounded like a parody of his best work.

Not surprisingly, Schwartz's letters are as irritatingly self-absorbed as his poems and stories. The earliest ones collected here date from his college years at the University of Wisconsin, when his sole correspondent was his friend, Julian Sawyer, who also had literary aspirations. Schwartz played the campus genius to the hilt, spouting grand pronouncements about world literature with unflagging confidence. Yet the most important note sounded in these early letters is the tone of faint derision directed at Sawyer. One might smile at such a sophomoric display and move on, but the tone never moderates. In fact, it grows more vicious as Schwartz's fame increases. The poet made a habit of befriending people, then cutting them out of his life with a vehemence that is shocking. There is little evident wit, charm or high jinks in these letters. When Schwartz is feeling good, when he has boarded the manic depressive roller coaster, as he calls it, and is heading up, the mood is genuinely manic and its intensity far from pleasant. The only glee the poet expresses comes when he is gossiping—incessantly, meanly—but because his remarks are generally so unpleasant and he is so unremittingly ill-tempered, it is difficult for anyone to share in this mood.

Schwartz's much–touted devotion to literature was also narrowly conceived. Discussions of books and authors are plentiful in the early part of the correspondence, but often the letters are of interest not for their remarkable insights but as demonstrations of Schwartz's alarming precocity. In 1938, at the ripe old age of 25, with the success of his first book under his belt, he thought nothing of writing to Ezra Pound and lecturing him on how he had "slowed up." But Schwartz's literary interests eventually fell prey to his narcissism. Even before his confidence as a writer had slipped and his paranoia had blossomed, there is talk only of *his* poetry, *his* career, *his* enemies.

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What the letters make clear, even more than does the Atlas biography, is the extent of Schwartz's career as a literary politician. Part of the tragedy of his life, aside from his madness and slow dissolution, was that so much of his energy, energy that might have been invested in creative work, went instead into *plotting* his next triumph rather than actually writing it. One has to marvel at the lengths he went to sell himself. In a letter to James Laughlin, his publisher at New Directions, Schwartz advises him that when copies of *Genesis* are available, he should "visit Irita Van Doren [editor of *The New York Herald Tribune Books*] and tell her what Mark Van Doren said of the book, write to [John Crowe] Ransom and move him to tears as you moved me by telling him of the cabal, visit J. Donald Adams [columnist for *The New York Times Book Review*] and persuade him to read the poem, and explain to him that a cabal of enemies is ready, visit Margaret Marshall [literary editor of *The Nation*] and point out that every one of my works has been attacked in *The Nation*." Schwartz conspires closely with the editors at *Partisan Review* to choose the "right" reviewer to cover *Genesis* for the magazine. He even writes a letter criticizing Richard Eberhart's review of the book in *The New Republic* and asks his friend John Berryman to sign it and send it on.

All of this desperate maneuvering did not arise solely from Schwartz's psychological state. He was fully aware of what he was doing. In another letter to Laughlin quoted in the Atlas biography, he suggests other devious ways his publisher might help him further his career, then says: "I do not intend to forget we are living in this world where dog eats dog, and books of noble poetry. The main thing, obviously, is to be perfectly aware that one is not being noble; it is only when one begins to deceive oneself about the character of one's maneuvers that one is really lost and damned forever." It was Berryman who called Schwartz Machiavelli's cousin, and for good reason.

Schwartz had the misfortune of being overpraised throughout his career—and long after. One of the faults of Atlas' biography is that the author argues too strenuously in favor of work that is obviously mediocre. But even at the start there were dissenting opinions. The myth is that Schwartz's first book *In Dreams Begin Responsibilities* met with unanimous praise. But as Atlas reports, critics like Babette Deutsch and Louis MacNeice, who were "unrestrained by friendship," proved less charitable. The most unfavorable notice came from Louise Bogan in *The Nation*. She found fault with the author's "Modernist pose" and "literary eclecticism." She concluded by saying that Schwartz was "a very brilliant young man" and that the short story which gave the book its title was a masterpiece. But she also noted that if Schwartz's work were to mature, he would have to cultivate the values of "simplicity and directness." Her judgment would seem to have withstood the test of time. Furthermore, on the evidence provided by the letters, one would have to agree with Sid-

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ney Hook, who has noted that Schwartz "peopled his world with imaginary enemies in order not to blame himself."

Schwartz's tragedy, as his friend William Barrett has said, had nothing to do with society's hostility to "the Poet." "Few persons of his age were ever given more opportunities to follow their calling," Hook wrote, "or enjoyed more kindnesses, or received more praise and encouragement . . ." Schwartz's failure was a human one; he and he alone was the culprit. The romantic myth of the poet who *suffers* his poetry seems firmly lodged in Western consciousness. We have little interest in writers who are steadily productive and lead tidy lives. But if any book could help dispel this fallacy, it would have to be *The Letters of Delmore Schwartz.* There is no mediating voice here—no memoirist or biographer shaping reality to suit his purposes. There is only a sad, wretchedly unhappy man raving on and on.

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ROBERT McDOWELL

The Mum Generation Was Always Talking

LONG AGO THE POET, CRITIC, AND LITERARY JOURNALIST Donald Hall decided to do something about the fashionable assumption that his generation lacked opinions. He did not agree, though he realized that opinions were not frequently expressed in the traditional form of the essay. Of course, there were (and are) exceptions, not the least of whom is Hall himself. For decades his own essays, tracts, and reviews have enthralled, outraged, instructed, promoted, and demolished poets, institutions, and readers of poetry. But he knew that the bulk of his generation's opinions were to be found elsewhere. They were found in the pages of miscellaneous little magazines in the form of interviews, tossed-off reviews, and casual notes. As years and magazines passed away, these opinions settled into the dusty anonymity of bookshelves. Hall's idea was to retrieve these documents, bring them out of the archives and make them available to a larger audience.

What he did with this idea is a triumph of small press production and courageous editing, and this triumph vindicates, in some ways, the generation in question.

Hall went to work lining up poets who agreed to collect their essays, interviews, reviews, recollections—their critical documents—in individual volumes which together would constitute a series. After failing to sell the series proposal to a large New York publisher, he approached the press at The University of Michigan. This turned out to be the luckiest development of all. Not only did The University of Michigan Press accept the proposal; through low overhead and small print runs it has managed to keep every title in print. Given Hall's desire to make these documents readily available to the public, this feat cannot be undervalued. For example, if the first four books had been remaindered, as they probably would have been had a commercial New York house published them, the series would have been terminated.

Today there are twenty-one volumes in the Poets on Poetry series with more planned. In fact, new titles appear with such regularity that I find I must prepare these comments while excluding the latest additions by Donald Justice and Hayden Carruth. I exclude them with regret. They are good poets, and I feel at ease recommending their books sight unseen.

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I recommend the entire series, though I have rather less zeal for a number of titles. The series makes for ragged, rugged, elliptical, and wonderful reading. It reflects its editor's love of *dialogue*, of talk about poetry. It puts to rest the myth that Hall's generation, aside from its poetry, is fundamentally silent. In fact, it confirms that this generation is highly opinionated. I have much to say, pro and con, about the quality of these opinions, but it is important to dispose of the myth and recognize that these poets have chosen to make their stands in unconventional ways. It does not matter that what shocks convention eventually becomes convention; these poets are not necessarily accountable for the bad habits of their imitators (though in the case of poet-teachers, amply represented in this series, this contention is debatable). For the purposes of my investigation it is enough that the documents have been diligently gathered and made available.

Donald Davie[1] has put together one of the better books in the series. An English poet-critic-scholar, Davie defends Tradition and is *always* the Man of Letters. In six pieces on individual poets (Allen Tate, Ed Dorn, Dylan Thomas, John Berryman, Robert Lowell, John Peck) and in six notes on Ezra Pound, he explicates poems, lives, careers, and cultures. His insights and prose style remind me of watching an unusually reflective member of the rural gentry paring a Red Delicious apple; they also recall Martin Heidegger's claim that thoughts find us.

It is refreshing to encounter a European intelligence in a series in which democratic values are so heavily displayed—". . . if my universe is verbal, so be it—I am happy in my glittering envelope, and will fight those who would puncture it." "Some Notes On Rhythm and Verse" gives a good glimpse into Davie's personal workshop, though some of his assertions ("metered verse can go into stanzas—free verse never can") will seem contentious to many Americans. He insists on humility, wide historical reading, *and* responsibility.

For the last twenty years, many American writers have engaged in backbiting or become embroiled in petty squabbles, but Donald Davie never loses sight of the larger issues at the heart of poetry.

Louis Simpson[2] is similar to Davie in many ways even though he presents an obvious counterpoint to him. Like Davie, he is never boring; he brings an historical sensibility to bear on his subjects; he is capable of the unforgettable, pithy comment: "Divorce may be to this century what the frontier was to the last."

Of course, counterpoint is inherent in Simpson's American—and narrative—sensibility. In one memorable essay among many, "Ad-

[1]TRYING TO EXPLAIN, by *Donald Davie*. $7.95. *Note:* All of the books footnoted in this review are published by The University of Michigan Press.

[2]A COMPANY OF POETS, by *Louis Simpson*. $7.95p.

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vice to the English," he deftly turns the tables on those who readily embrace a faulty assumption: "The main difference between contemporary American and English verse is that, as a rule, Americans are much concerned with technique, the English are not." Later, he assails the English writer who "too often loses the sense of poetry as drama, with downs as well as ups." This comment, made in the sixties, echoes with disturbing resonance in the ears of those who are dissatisfied with the increasingly meditative efforts (on both sides of the Atlantic) of a new generation of poets.

These and other readers will find that this book contains some of the wisest insights anywhere into the poetry of the sixties, narrative, projective, and surrealist verse, meter and rhythm.

A different manifestation of wisdom—that of the brooding spiritualist—is found in books by John Haines[3] and John Logan.[4]

Living Off the Country opens with six pieces focusing on John Haines's homesteading experiences in Alaska. As a group they convey the impression that we are in the presence of a complete citizen; poetry is one of many essential activities in a full and responsible life. This practical awareness forms the basis of all Haines's literary judgments. It distinguishes his opinions from those of the professional opinion-grinder and makes us yearn for a literary environment where more voices like his were possible. Instead, we exist in a world in which "poets seem too much centered on themselves. Not in a deeply inward way, for that takes the individual away from his everyday self. But as people who are inwardly bored, for whom the outside world of nature and humanity, the great landscape which includes everything, is of no more than slight interest . . . The larger thing is missing, the message, the tale to tell, the personal story of one touched by God or Fate."

In nine pieces ranging from notes on the poet's vocation to book reviews to letters to the editor, Haines celebrates the "separate and perceiving" vision of a poet like Jeffers, laments our lack of regard for the past and the sterile character of much of his generation: "One notices how few actual people there are in contemporary poems; only the poet and his personality seem capable of life."

Haines repeatedly stresses the importance of *place* and the "conviction of circumstance" in poetry, and he concludes this austere volume with twenty-five priceless pages of autobiography. Everything in this book will act as a balm relieving the itch of self-satisfaction. Because Haines is by no means a "mainstream" poet, his book might be overlooked by many. Nevertheless, it is *the* sleeper in the series.

John Logan's book provides one of the few examples of material

[3]LIVING OFF THE COUNTRY, by *John Haines*. $7.95p.

[4]A BALLET FOR THE EAR: INTERVIEWS, ESSAYS, AND REVIEWS, by *John Logan*, ed. by *A. Poulin, Jr.* $7.95.

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selected and arranged by someone other than the author. A. Poulin, Jr. carefully presents representative excerpts from Logan's interviews, essays, and memoirs. There is also a lengthy selection of poetry concluding the volume. It speaks well of Poulin's efforts that even the opening section—nearly fifty pages of excerpts from interviews—seems useful. These edited excerpts remind us of the facts of Logan's life: his late arrival to poetry, his large family, his scholarship, scientific background, and catholicism, his views on teaching. Gradually, Logan emerges as a poetic spiritual guide and interpreter.

This impression adds weight to his excellent essays on Thomas, Melville, Crane, Cummings, and Beckett. An essay on his own early poems is impersonal, heavily focusing on influences literary and otherwise. The book reviews of the third section are less compelling (tossed-off?), short asides of a thinker more preoccupied with Love's necessity than with individual poems.

If John Logan sometimes comes across like a faded flower child, his good will, intelligence, and commitment to learning spare him permanent embarrassment. These characteristics and Poulin's editing spare him. Here is Logan concluding his essay on Dylan Thomas: "Poems are resurrecting acts, recreative, saving or perhaps damning the members of the poet's own internal, mystical family, the parts and people he finds in himself . . . which he resurrects in his poems, putting them into relations of peace or violence he wants for them, though ultimately if we follow Thomas the poem itself is a peace, a paradise which delights and in which tensions are resolved and everything is changed into the beautiful and the lasting . . ."

What Logan constructs with Poulin's able assistance, Robert Bly[5] constructs himself. Bly is also an advocate of the poet as spiritual guide and teacher, but his is an advocacy with a difference. Bly turns less to traditional Western culture for authority and more toward the East. His is a strident voice exhorting simpler values, a return to primitivism that has been in vogue in one section of our society or another since Industrial Complication began.

For years I have had trouble coming to terms with this voice. When I discover, as I do here, too many interviews in which Bly rattles on about our three brains or the Death Mother or the Insipid Academy, when I meet his outrageous declaration that if everybody settled into lotus positions there would be no more wars, I am face to face with the boorish Bly of my longest literary nightmare.

But there is somthing else to Bly, and it comes through in this volume. When I read "Leaping Up into Political Poetry" or his 1968 acceptance speech for the National Book Award, I am reminded of his genuine service to our national political and spiritual health.

[5]TALKING ALL MORNING, by *Robert Bly*. $7.95.

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When he writes about starting *The Fifties* I remember how lucky American literature was to have it. What he said about poetry in the sixties was prophetic: "I think it's mainly the absence of public criticism that's a disaster: the disappearance of criticism. Private criticism doesn't count. We notice magazines with nothing but poems in them, not a single review or 'idea' article. The cliché of the last ten years is, 'I want to say something positive. If I can't say something positive I don't want to say anything at all.'" When I read such comments my complaints seem trivial, and I cannot help but think of Theodore Roethke's sloth: "you just know he knows."

A lot of Marvin Bell's[6] book, especially in sections one and two (of three), embodies the complaint registered by Bly above. His opening section consists of ten essays, several of which betray a fascination with *self*, a conscious decision to discuss, say, William Carlos Williams, Wallace Stevens, or W. H. Auden while actually focusing on the narrator's development as a writer. The method is neither revealing nor delightful, but it is representative of the late-Romantic collar around the neck of the generation succeeding Lowell and Berryman, Auden and Jarrell. Inherent in this method is the evasion of criticism and the implication that to find fault with the poem is to find fault with the individual who wrote it. Given the state of mind behind the method—and neither is unique to Bell—the very act of writing an essay becomes ironic. One practices what one hates. "Recently, a student said to me, 'we all need a little more courage now and then.' That's what I need. If you have some to share, I want to know you. Your criticisms you can keep to yourself." This assertion at the end of "Influences" exudes self-righteousness and does not wear well.

Even so, Bell has his moments. He is especially acute when taking poets to task for the employment of slap-happy images: "Our practice of Imagism . . . much of the time has been mindless—the one great flaw in American poetry by which our practice is shown to be limited by an absence of sufficiently considered theory." The implications of this sentence exceed the topic of the essay in which it appears, but its presence suggests what Bell is capable of if he would choose to theorize. At bottom, he distrusts it. The moment his specimen twitches he thinks better of the examination, replaces his probe in its zippered case and settles into a *long* report about . . . about running in the Boston Marathon!

Bell's second section, consisting of four interviews, is a conglomeration of defensive commentary and sloppy argumentation. At one point, he claims that ". . . now there's less rationality and more passion. We've gained permission for our poetry from work translated from other cultures." It is hard to believe he means this, for how can he equate "passion" with "permission," as if the former would not assert itself without the latter?

[6]OLD SNOW JUST MELTING, by *Marvin Bell.* $7.95.

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The final section collects eleven essays which originally appeared in *American Poetry Review* from 1975-1978, and it is here that you will discover the best this book has to offer. Bell praises Ashbery, Stafford, Bly, Rilke, and writes a lovely homage to his teacher, John Logan. Though Bell praises frequently, he sometimes praises accurately and well.

David Ignatow[7] seems to be the antithesis of Marvin Bell, but close examination of his contribution (loosely edited by Ralph J. Mills) reveals that the difference is one of temperament, not principle. Unlike Bell, Ignatow is more than ready to sling mud. Speaking of John Hollander, Harold Bloom, and Richard Howard, he declares that he "threatens their basic assumption about poetry which is that language takes precedence over content. They think through language you learn of life. I say you learn of life through sensibility which then has to be translated into language. Their tradition is a bastard romanticism." Apparently, Ignatow fails to realize that his concern for content as a mystical rhetorical form also constitutes, in his words, "a bastard romanticism."

Structurally, this book is dominated by autobiography. It reveals that this author just isn't up to the task of evaluating literature—Modern or otherwise. One cannot help but be deeply suspicious of a poet who praises Whitman then leaps to Williams (whom he writes best about) and the younger generation succeeding Ignatow (poets who "discovered" his work). One cannot help but suspect a poet capable of the obscene assumption that his contemporaries, Lowell and Berryman, did not take their lives seriously. This is a bitter book, its vinegar liberally applied with no constructive intent.

After reading the first essay, which considers the *delicacy* of Whitman, in the late James Wright's *Collected Prose*,[8] one feels relief at being again in the grip of a writer who is capable of explicating the current situation by exploring the past. Wright instilled in his critical prose a restless historical intelligence, which on occasion he felt compelled to deny. These infrequent lapses are understandable nods to the self-effacing, anti-scholarly mood of his generation.

What sticks with the reader are three *readable* essays on early and late Dickens, essays on Frost, Neruda, Warren, Hardy, and Theodor Storm, notes on Chinese poetry, on Trakl, Vallejo, and Hesse, meditations on René Char, and the best essay on Gary Snyder's work I have read. These pieces stick because they represent the kind of criticism that only a writer is capable of. It is as if the critic were breathing through the same set of lungs as his subject. The "Meditations" on Char contains this wonderful, workable definition (and a warning) of the two functions of criticism: "It ought to direct a reader to the work of the author who is under discussion; and,

[7]OPEN BETWEEN US, by *David Ignatow*. $7.95.
[8]COLLECTED PROSE, by *James Wright*, ed. by *Anne Wright*. $8.95.

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once the reader is there, criticism ought to illuminate the work. To achieve these ends, a critic is justified in doing anything. I mean anything: except build a theory so large and involved that both reader and critic forget the original work, as a child looking for his parents at a carnival might forget them in the self-mirroring distortions of the fun house."

Maxine Kumin[9] ably carries out these functions in her book and does so especially well in three pieces on the work and life of her late friend and fellow poet, Anne Sexton. Her essays on Frost and Larkin are durable; when she writes about her own process she is as thorough and enlightening as any self-critical poet can be. But her "Three Lectures On Poetry" is the most memorable section here. In these pieces she examines closure and intention in poems as well as what she calls the four kinds of *I*. This last subject is intriguing, though I still don't quite know what to make of her *ideational I* and her distinction between the *lyrical* and *autobiographical I*. My own dull-wittedness aside, this is a valuable piece for anyone who frets about the show the first person has been making in poem after poem.

Finally, Kumin impresses us as an earnest practitioner of poetry, a versatile thinker, enlightened parent, and a citizen who is very much involved in her human and animal environment. Her book is uplifting in some of the same ways John Haines's book is.

This might be an appropriate moment to reverse direction and focus on the book by Diane Wakoski.[10] It is in a class by itself. It tells you everything you will ever want to know about the author and might better have been called *Wakoski—Why Not?* This is a book of snap judgments, bad girl posing, breaking into a critic's wardrobe and playing dress-up.

Specifically, Wakoski sees herself as the avenging angel-promoter of "new poetry." According to her, the "new" poet begins with inwardness and turns it outward. Incredibly, Wakoski believes this to be a twentieth-century phenomenon. But this sort of oversight is precisely the point. In columns (from *APR*), articles, pamphlets, essays, notes, and interviews, Wakoski misuses terms, expresses herself in adolescent, slanderous generalizations, and seems to be saying to readers "I don't care how you take me." Two opinions involving teaching and criticism provide examples. At one point, she confesses that she doesn't know how to teach poems of the past. After all, dead poets are *dead*. Surprisingly, she has nothing to say about all of the dead poets who are still living. Later, she acknowledges that "there are practically no critics of contemporary poetry left . . ." and then proceeds to prove it by doing.

[9]TO MAKE A PRAIRIE: ESSAYS ON POETS, POETRY, AND COUNTRY LIVING, by *Maxine Kumin*. $7.95.

[10]TOWARD A NEW POETRY, by *Diane Wakoski*. $7.95.

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There *are* two worthwhile pieces here, "A Tribute to Anaïs Nin" and "Little Magazines and Poetry Factions." Otherwise, this obstacle course of a book is worth reading only if you want to see how bad such a book can be.

Two other books that exemplify the shortcomings of a popular method are by Philip Levine[11] and Galway Kinnell.[12] Both of these consist exclusively of interviews. Levine presents a terse preface and eight interviews which occurred between 1972 and 1979. Kinnell's preface extends to six pages and is a little more carefully constructed than Levine's; it is followed by eleven interviews.

Though Levine in his preface warns us that what follows is frequently contradictory, I must contradict him. There is remarkable consistency in his opinions and remarks on influences, politics, writing workshops, psychology, sex, love, death, family, and the composition of poems. He is sarcastic, funny, and repetitious. Depending on how you react to this book, you will cringe or chuckle upon encountering Levine's favorite response for the umpteenth time: "I don't really know." More than anything else, this book is *about* personality, and I am a reader who appreciates Levine's. In this sense the book will tell you nothing about the writing of poetry; it may also tell you everything about it, about Levine's poetry, anyway.

Kinnell's topics of conversation are much more specific, which suggests that he spent more time than Levine editing the interviews. His book is valuable as a writer's working diary. Kinnell discusses writing habits, the genesis of individual poems, teaching, readings, politics, and confession. His tone is serious, his manner straightforward. Mirroring the consensus aspiration of his generation, Kinnell is devoted to recovering personal mystery; analysis is antithetical to that mission. It follows, then, that he eschews a firm grasp of form and style (though readers of his poetry know better). He inaccurately refers to narrative as poetry that is somehow easier to write and concedes to prose fiction the resources to extend narrative. Finally, he advises young writers to reject advice. It is difficult not to admire Kinnell, generally, and especially for occasional pithy statements which are accurate and probably helpful to some. Besides a good laugh now and then, this is probably all we should hope for from interviews.

Fortunately, books by William Stafford[13] and Marge Piercy[14] are not exclusively interviews. Both of these writers have contributed rough productions to the series, rough in that they shine and go dark with alarming regularity.

Stafford's volume is dominated by brief autobiographical notes (the facts of his boyhood, education, incarceration as a conscientious

[11] DON'T ASK, by *Philip Levine*. *$7.95*.
[12] WALKING DOWN THE STAIRS, by *Galway Kinnel*. $7.95.
[13] WRITING THE AUSTRALIAN CRAWL, by *William Stafford*. $7.95.
[14] PARTI-COLORED BLOCKS FOR A QUILT, by *Marge Piercy*. $7.95.

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objector from 1940-44, religious training, writing habits) and essays which consistently display the tics of his generation. "My guide is the self," he says. "Literature is not a relay race . . . but like something more horizontal and immediate, something that develops amid influences that for the most part are not literary." This point of view, which implies a by now common rejection of traditional values, actually has its origin in Dante. It fascinates me because I find it impossible to reconcile with what Stafford actually does in his work. ". . . and I feel the *bite* of her [his mother's] disappointment in life, and a *wry* angle of her vision. My *dashing* brother *getting out* into the *big* world—he recurs to me—and my father *taking me out for a ride in a racing car*—right down by the *big* engine I *crouched* . . . " The italics are mine. I employ them to call attention to the romantic character of Stafford's language. Is this flying in the face of Tradition?

It strikes me—this rejection of Tradition—as a pose encouraging the poseur to utter silly statements: "When I write, grammar is my enemy . . . I see critics like markers in a channel, tugged by what they measure, but I see writers like minnows disporting themselves in flurries of action that avoid the current." Maybe what we need now is a shark, a barracuda, one very hungry whale.

Like Stafford, Marge Piercy does not always preach what she practices. Her preoccupation with her method and accomplishments in poetry and prose become tiresome, but when she refuses to separate artistic and political commitment, when she refuses to buy into the elitism generated by the Feminist Movement but credits it with fostering culture to a greater extent than the New Left did, she commands respect. She is at her best at moments like these and in essays in which she promotes the work of writers like Audre Lorde and Joanna Russ.

Her limitation as a critic—and in this she is not unique—is an inability to incorporate the perspective of literary history in her theories. She is weak when faced with textual analysis and focuses, instead, on the *vision* of the writer in question. But if you can come to terms with this limitation, her political savvy will reward you.

The next three books seem isolated in this series, and they seem so for different reasons.

Richard Kostelanetz[15] has an axe to grind. He divides his book into two sections designed to accommodate, define, and expose the two types of poetry listed in his title.

"It is, I believe, possible," he writes in his opening section, "for an individual work today to break *all* of the old rules and still attain significances familiar to the traditions of poetry." But just what these significances are is not always apparent. Complicating matters

[15]THE OLD POETRIES AND THE NEW, by *Richard Kostelanetz.* $7.95.

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is the unfortunate evidence that the bedrock of Kostelanetz's poetic theory seems to be the comment by Marianne Moore that she called her work poetry because there was no other category in which to put it. This aligns him with the criticism of reductivism, which is romantic; it also aligns him with the contradictions apparent in Stafford, Kinnell, and many others.

His second section, "The New Poetries," consists of essays and notes on visual poetry and text-sound art. These are always informative and occasionally interesting, but somehow they put me in mind of Dylan Thomas' narrator in "A Child's Christmas In Wales," who received a book about the wasp which told him everything except *why*. When Kostelanetz says of Cummings "he had a casual sense of poetry that some of us find attractive," when he refers to John Cage as "a master of several arts, a slave to none," when he says of himself "since I am scarcely able to invent a situation from scratch—or, to be more precise, since I am more inventive with materials than imaginative with situations . . ." he inadvertently trivializes the poetry he wishes to promote. I am grateful for the new knowledge this book gave me, but I wish Kostelanetz had taken greater care with his subject and gone much further in his explorations of it.

I cannot level the same criticism at Alicia Ostriker.[16] Her book is superb. Concentrating on the lives and works of other women writers and on her own experience, she presents the most eloquent example of feminist consciousness in this series. Her long piece on H.D. reads like a labor of love; her essays on Plath and Sexton are even better, displaying an acute historical understanding of these poets' methods and intentions; her essay on May Swenson is a competent appreciation, and her essay on Adrienne Rich is exceptional. In the latter, she identifies Rich's great strength: "For one thing it is narrative. The poet does not remain trapped in stasis and analysis, helplessly acted upon. She makes a move; she acts . . . Out of the past she invents an altered symbolism." Later she considers Rich's assumption of "the enemy" and issues this sober warning: "But when an angry woman implies that she fantasizes punishing her enemy purely for his own good, she begins to resemble the officer who said he burned the village to save it. It is pleasant and self-deceptive to feel that 'I' or 'we' are violent only in response to 'their' violence. It is pleasant to believe that aggressiveness, competitiveness, selfishness, egotism, violence, are 'their' characteristics, not mine. The unfortunate truth is that they are human characteristics. The liberated will find these impulses newly released within themselves, and may want to take responsibility for them." This is the voice of a keen and historically conscious thinker whose inclusion here considerably raises the quality of this series.

[16]WRITING LIKE A WOMAN, by *Alicia Ostriker*. $8.95.

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I had hopes that the volume by Robert Francis[17] would do the same, and in the first of four sections, "The Satirical Rogue on Poetry," I was mightily entertained. It doesn't matter that these eighty-four pieces (almost all one page or less, and many a lot less) are reprinted from a 1969 University of Massachusetts Press publication. It is good to have it back in print. It is unfortunate, however, that Francis did so little for the rest of the book. Its middle sections consist of the obligatory interview and a fable about what it is to be a writer; the closing section, "The Satirical Rogue Again," balances the first section but lacks its wit and sarcasm.

At his best, Francis is bitingly charming. He exercises a strong sense of irony in one aphoristic excursion after another. Even his titles—"Be Brutal," "On Looking Like a Poet," "Love Me, Love My Poems,"—clearly announce his intentions. Anyone familiar with the television program "60 Minutes" will recognize a resemblance between Francis and Andy Rooney. It's good to know that poetry has had personalities like that.

The remaining two books, and two of the best, are by the series' general editor. The first[18] collects interviews, essays, and notes on poetry from 1970 to 1976; the second[19] volume is longer but tighter. It is made up of many more reviews, celebrations, and autobiographical notes from 1977 to 1981.

Introducing in his first preface what is to come, Donald Hall might be accurately commenting on the casual atmosphere of the series and defining his overall hopes for it: "I merely assemble my periodical talk about poetry from the last several years . . . I would hope this book might be useful to young poets trying out their ideas. Most likely to sharpen their claws on." He disappoints this ambition in neither of his volumes; overall, his series does not, either.

As a prose writer, Hall's style ought to be familiar to anyone even casually aware of contemporary literature. Whether he is concocting an hilarious list of interchangeable huzzahs in "The Blurb Writer's Friend" or assailing the *New York Times Book Review*'s "contempt for poetry," whether he is writing sensibly about prose poems (at a time when village explainers sounded defensive and uncertain) or praising a neglected Kenneth Rexroth or sharing his impressions of a Poetry Day at the White House, Hall does more to restore one's appreciation for "talk about poetry" than practically anyone imaginable. As a writer who is tolerant enough to consider talk and note-sharing as valid critical discourse and as a cranky traditionalist, he both symbolizes his generation and transcends it. He is generous

[17]POT SHOTS AT POETRY, by *Robert Francis*. $7.95.
[18]GOATFOOT, MILKTONGUE, TWINBIRD, by *Donald Hall*. $7.95.
[19] THE WEATHER FOR POETRY, by *Donald Hall*. $7.95.

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with honest opinion. Unlike many of his peers, he has thought out and tested what he needed to say before he said it. That sort of care shows in the work, and readers of these books are better off because of it.

It is difficult to assess the character of a generation, especially when it must be determined by analysis of strongly varied personalities like those represented in this series. Even though personalities differ, certain tics are shared and made manifest in the poetry and in remarks about poetry. In the same sense that we ought not to confuse *personality* with *character,* we ought not to confuse *opinion* with *conviction.* Hall's generation, but for a few exceptions, has consistently confused these terms, and it has led to rejection of the essay. Though the essay allows for the explanation of attitudes and strategies in ways best avoided in poems, most of the poets in this series have grown up equating proficiency in the form with lifeless conservatism. In fact, many are intimidated by the form and hide behind an equally lifeless facade—"Toadies write essays. People like Winters. Poets don't!"

Of course, many of these poets are intimidated for good reason. The series makes clear that, generally, their generation is not learned in a classical sense. Only a few reveal more than a daily newsreader's grasp of the social and political issues of the day; fewer still can rise above a grade school efficiency in philosophy and other languages. What emerges from these limitations are two unreliable forms of expression: memoir and interview.

Memoir, like the essay, has long been a popular form, even with poets. It is dangerous for poets, too. A memoir's essential premise is that a life—and a life can be quite separate from work—is worth remembering. Too many contemporary poets have used the form to meander along the backwaters of personal experience, and whether or not they connect with readers on any meaningful level is incidental. Too much confrontation with this attitude will send the reader in search of memoirs of generals or arctic explorers for relief. It is not too much to expect a memoir-writing poet to have had experiences that are as fascinating as those of Yeats or John Haines. If experience is mundane (true of many writers), it ought not to be pickled in the preservation jar of memoir.

Even worse than memoir as a substitute for the essay is interview. It is worse, but it is not difficult to understand its charm. It is, after all, easier to talk than to write, and when writing it is especially difficult to be compelling *and* logical. Furthermore, we cannot overlook our living in the American eighties where relentless media hype encourages us to worship dubious celebrities. Is it possible that the prominence of the literary interview is a result of a writer's desire to appear on a TV talk show? Maybe we (even writers) watch these shows because we want to see and hear our heroes and hero-

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ines look as awkward and sound as spontaneously stupid as we secretly believe we look and sound. There might be some reassurance as well. If we appear on a talk show—if we are interviewed—isn't our importance confirmed? There is nothing wrong with a little flattery, but the epidemic of interviews and the chattiness of much contemporary poetry raises this question: Have we lost the ability to take seriously anything but our selves talking, deaf to the spontaneously stupid comments we make?

Interviews can have some critical value, but only if questions are agreed upon in advance, if transitions from one thematic segment to another are logical, and if someone edits and revises the text. These demands may impinge on spontaneity, but who would not gladly give up gossip for good reading. Of course, without the varied reading *and* gossip provided by Hall's Poets on Poetry series, I would not have been prompted to make these remarks. In my case, anyway, the General Editor's ambitions for the series have been realized.

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MARVIN MUDRICK

The King and His Queens

GEORGE BALANCHINE WAS THE LAST AND GREATEST artistic genius and culture-hero of the century, and now that he's gone the documentations and appraisals are at least pouring in though not necessarily measuring up.[1] One volume which does measure up is *Choreography by George Balanchine: A Catalogue of Works,* issued in the nick of time for Balanchine, who at the hospital during his mortal illness received and examined and gleefully exhibited to visitors the first copy off the press. "Among the four hundred twenty-five items listed," Bernard Taper summarizes, "are more than two hundred ballets, five films, twenty-three musical comedies and revues, six stagings for choral works, ten plans for which Balanchine arranged movement sequences, fifty-nine operas for which he choreographed the dances, and any number of occasion pieces for the most disparate of occasions—from a foxtrot in Petrograd in 1921 in honor of the treaty reinstating Anglo-Soviet trade relations to a polio ballet for the March of Dimes [Taper's unfortunate shorthand; but *Resurgence,* in 1946, *was* about polio, Balanchine himself danced the role of "Threat of Polio"(!), and the ballerina was Tanaquil Le Clercq: in 1952 she and Balanchine were married; in 1957 she was permanently paralyzed by an attack of polio], to a cotillion promenade for some five hundred couples for the Negro Debutante Ball at the 369th Armory in Harlem in 1953. . . . He kept it by his bedside. 'There it is,' he told visitors, 'the Bible.'" Beyond dates, places, and casts it provides valuable and evocative notes and comments, e.g. to Taper who without it would never have heard of that Petrograd foxtrot which "the Bible" memorializes as Item No. 5:

> By 1921, the Bolsheviks had signed treaties with a number of European and Asian countries, renouncing claims to various border territories, guaranteeing mutual non-aggression in some cases, and resuming trade relations. Perhaps the most important of these was the Anglo-Soviet trade agreement of March 16, 1921,

[1]CHOREOGRAPHY BY GEORGE BALANCHINE: A CATALOGUE OF WORKS. Viking. $20.00. BALANCHINE: A BIOGRAPHY, by *Bernard Taper.* Times Books. $19.95. BALANCHINE'S BALLERINAS: CONVERSATIONS WITH THE MUSES, by *Robert Tracy* with *Sharon DeLano.* Simon and Schuster. $25.00. PORTRAIT OF MR. B: PHOTOGRAPHS OF GEORGE BALANCHINE, with an essay by *Lincoln Kirstein.* Viking. $12.95. DANCING FOR BALANCHINE, by *Merrill Ashley.* Dutton. $29.95. BALANCHINE'S MOZARTIANA: THE MAKING OF A MASTERPIECE, by *Robert Maiorano* and *Valerie Brooks.* Freundlich. $18.95.

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> in which Lenin opened the ports of Leningrad to trade with the West. In celebration of this (or, perhaps, another similar treaty), a giant party was held; for entertainment there were actors, German music, and a foxtrot composed for the crowd by Balanchine.

—because Balanchine, at seventeen, was already a musician and composer as well as a Maryinsky-trained dancer and choreographer. (Not that the *Catalogue* is without exception clear and accurate. Was that foxtrot just a tune Balanchine composed for the occasion or did he besides "compose" a dance to it? And here's the account of *Meditation*: "On the darkened stage a solitary, troubled young man enters and kneels. He is approached by a young woman who seeks to comfort him. They dance together and embrace; in the end she departs, and he is again alone." But the troubled man is *not* young; in *Balanchine's Ballerinas*, considering whether *Meditation* seems to her an unusually personal work of Balanchine's, Suzanne Farrell—on whom it was made and who danced it with Jacques d'Amboise—observes: "I suppose it might be significant that Balanchine always asked Jacques to put gray in his hair. So perhaps he did identify with the role of my partner." In her effort to be tactful Farrell is bending over backwards, which she does very well.)

Taper's book began decades ago as a *New Yorker* profile, and it still has the symptoms: calm, cool, neat and collected and linear, modishly low-key, innocent of perspective or innards; bland with unwarranted self-satisfaction (but a profile: one-eyed). It isn't biography, it isn't history, it isn't culture; but anyhow what is it? It hardly amounts to more than what most of it seems to have been put together out of—Balanchine's capricious and offhand responses to bushels of questions from a predisposed and accommodating interviewer, as if God had condescended to be persuaded by an in-house PR man to tell in an idle hour now and again His side of the story for the parish paper. God, it turns out, is a great kidder; likes to make jokes about his father for instance:

> Surprised at how expensive life had suddenly become, . . . [Balanchine's father, who has won a lottery] heeded the advice of people who urged him to put part of his new fortune into some sound business; he opened a handsomely decorated Georgian-style restaurant in a fashionable quarter of St. Petersburg. This venture soon proved to be a costly mistake, because . . . [he] could never bring himself to charge even the slightest of acquaintances for their meals, and they, in turn, never affronted him by offering to pay. To recoup his losses, . . . [he] then invested in a factory that would produce foundry vats by a new process. This proved to be not merely a blunder, like the restaurant, but totally ruinous, and he was sent to prison for two years on a charge of wilful bankruptcy. His wife did not tell the children where he was (they learned this only after they were grown) but

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> led them to understand that he was off in the Caucasus gathering folk songs [he was a musician]. Balanchine well remembered the day his father returned. The boy, then about six or seven years old, was with his family on the porch of a house they had moved to in the country. Glancing up, he saw his father coming in at the garden gate, dressed as elegantly as ever and carrying a single red rose in his hand. "Oh, look!" Georgi's mother cried. "Here's your father back from—back from the Caucasus!" And they all rushed down the path to embrace him.

The episode wouldn't have seemed as funny at the time, especially to the father; but Balanchine was a master of comic anecdotes, he liked to recreate the past as a series of pratfalls leading without fail to the sunlit heights of the present, and Taper helpfully takes his word for it. Why sweat and strain if your subject does all the work before you start to lift a finger? In 1931 Balanchine was in England contributing numbers—with a troupe of dancers advertised as "16 Delightful Balanchine Girls 16"—to several variety shows: "Cravatted and bowler-hatted, he used to go riding in Hyde Park on Sundays. He had his suits made at Anderson and Sheppard, and he learned to roll an umbrella. With umbrella impeccably rolled and trousers impeccably baggy, he fancied himself the very model of an English gentleman." Eventually the English jobs petered out and he had to go back to Paris:

> Alexandra Danilova was waiting for Balanchine's return in their Paris apartment. When he arrived, she was particularly distressed to learn what he had done with the car [having no money for the import duties at the Calais dock, where he had brought it from England, he gave it away to a bystander] because she had just bought herself a complete outfit to go with it—green hat, green shoes, green dress, green bag. All that Balanchine had to offer her as a present was a bottle of toilet water he had bought in London. She regarded it with astonishment. Her blue eyes sparkled with icy incredulity, her proud neck arched regally. She looked magnificent. "Toilet water? To Paris! How very kind of you—I can see you've been thinking of me night and day." And she took the bottle and threw it at his head.

Balanchine was an accomplished cook, and these are a pair of his English trifles (very likely the latter paragraph got checked and spiced if not indeed originally contrived up to its ice-cold blueberry eyes by the superb and sardonic Danilova herself, not only a great dancer but a charming fabulist in her own right).

Taper seems to have no technical knowledge of dance, no authoritative intuition either, he says nothing striking about it, he just gets a kick out of Balanchine ballets (like many another besotted fan), nor does even this naïve enthusiasm leap off the pages. It's a presumably reliable chronology, it's a fan-club recollection of the dear

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departed, Balanchine's privacy remains inviolate, and nobody takes a cuff in the chops except two of the other deceased: the self-invented "Colonel de Basil," director of the Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo ("a tall, gaunt man with thick-lensed glasses behind which gleamed cold, shrewd eyes": cold eyes again! with which plus those glasses and a makeup man's Mongolian fold he could have played a Jap admiral in a movie about the Battle of Leyte Gulf); also John Martin, bonehead ballet critic for the New York *Times* ("of *Serenade*, Martin wrote: 'It is a serviceable rather than an inspired piece of work. No doubt Mr. Balanchine had his problems in devising choreography for an inexperienced company, but whatever the reasons, *Serenade* lacks spontaneity to a great extent' "—which ranks with a judgment by the composer Louis Spohr, who attended the premiere of the Beethoven Ninth and pronounced it a waste of time). Otherwise a suave and inoffensive book, which couldn't hurt a fly.

Technical knowledge does little for Lincoln Kirstein however (one assumes he has it after fifty years as Balanchine's sponsor, money-raiser, and aide-de-camp), who these days as the last link to the irrecoverable past is in much demand from book publishers and newspaper editors for prefaces, forewords, introductions, blurbs, and I-was-there hails-and-farewells. When the Balanchine dancer of the 'thirties Lew Christensen died some months back, Kirstein's brief eulogy among the daily obituaries extolled "all six feet of him"—an unfair advantage that must have kept Christensen exceptionally busy on stage. Kirstein has always writ a language only accidentally related to English, expanding every sentence into a panoramic view of life, art, genetics, society, religion, and the cosmos, as in his Introduction to *Portrait of Mr. B*: "In 1934, modern dance was exulting in the progressive assertion of experiment, in the endless duel between the innovator and tradition. Here the influence was an inheritance from Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, subsequently homogenized in the blanket educational reformative attitude of William James and John B. Watson"; "His observance of the rites of Russian Orthodoxy was inborn [?] and unswerving"; "He was something of an amateur theologian, as were his friends Wystan Auden, J. Robert Oppenheimer, and Igor Stravinsky"; "Many modern therapies, with current spiritual scenarios, preach condign avoidance of suffering as if it were anathema, the unearned deserts of mindless fate"; "Balanchine's belief was akin to Søren Kierkegaard's" (but unlike Bugsy Kierkegaard's, which stressed not chance or fate but a marked deck and polarized thick-lensed glasses). Thank God the condign and inborn Russian Balanchine couldn't have expected to understand one word of it, must have inferred Kirstein was saying his prayers, and merely continued making great ballets until and after Kirstein wandered off to solicit rich friends for more and more money for George; and we are all grateful. The photographs in the book are numerous, various, and—as always of Balanchine—very beautiful.

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It's professional dancers who speak in the three remaining books, and what they speak is English, however reminiscent of other native languages or modified and specialized by the terms they need to use to designate the specific methods and movements they speak of. All three are pertinent, informative, and reasonably candid. The most personal and gossipy and accessible is *Balanchine's Ballerinas*, a collection of interviews with the nineteen women of the title who helped him span the sixty years of his career, from his first partner and first wife, back in the Imperial Ballet School days ("I was his first Galatea"), Tamara Geva, to his last principal dancer, Darci Kistler ("He said, 'Don't emote. Listening to the music will put you in the mood. If you do any more it's ridiculous' "). Melissa Hayden can't restrain her sense of having been wronged because he preferred other dancers to her ("he chose to have such youthful dancers around him. . . . The Farrell years were difficult for everybody. . . . For instance, Suzanne had a bad knee, so we hardly ever jumped"; and when Hayden "asked him if I could have back one of the ballets . . . created for me . . . he gave me the most devastating answer: 'No, dear,' he said, 'you're too old' "). She concludes with an unexpected flourish of bravado, staking her claim as prima among the ballerinas: "I was sometimes impatient, and sometimes bitter, but in the end I was the ballerina of Balanchine's company"; but, though she may have eased her mind a bit, she won't bring anybody round who attended more than a few performances during those years.

Obviously they all loved him ("He was adorable," sighs one of them), and he loved many or most of them (Diaghilev, who had other proclivities, was scornful of Balanchine's "morbid interest in women"); but all of them and he too spent most of their time and energy in classes and rehearsals: "If you marry a ballerina," he said to an interviewer, "you never have to worry about whether she's running around with somebody else or anything like that. You always know exactly where she is—in the studio, working." Felia Doubrovska, who danced with him in the 'twenties and taught at his school much later, talks about one of his favorites, Allegra Kent: "a most wonderful student. But she spoil her career. Balanchine like her very much, and so do I. I remember on Christmas she give me a present. I say, 'Allegra, there is rule, no presents for teachers.' But she run away, saying, 'There are no rules for me.' Balanchine always ask me to speak with Allegra, because I think he is afraid of her." Kent herself on "the first ballet I saw and liked," Balanchine's *Night Shadow* (later renamed *La Sonnambula*), with its astounding climactic moment when the Sleepwalker receives the dead poet in her arms and thus cradling him backs slowly offstage: "I couldn't believe my eyes. I thought, Did I see that or did I imagine that? But I just kept silent. As a child I didn't like to talk about what I'd seen." (I saw Kent dance the Sleepwalker many times, and once after seeing her do it I asked her—a small, wraithlike woman—how she could manage that ending. "Well, you see, I don't have to *lift* him,"

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she replied matter-of-factly.) Farrell—"my Muse," Balanchine called her; "my Stradivarius"—isn't remembered too kindly by some, though all concede his uninterrupted "fascination" with her; but Maria Tallchief says about Balanchine's all-time favorite dancer, perhaps not unambiguously, "This lady knows exactly what Balanchine wants." Farrell herself on what a ballerina has to be: "You have to be many things, but I think a woman should be idolized. Balanchine idolized women." Matters of fact, stated matter-of-factly.

Merrill Ashley, though, makes plain at once her preference for altogether different matters of fact: sustained and often frightening and exhausting physical disciplines; the routine of instruction and repetition; the perils of public performance; aches, pains, grim determination ("by dint of hard work it was still possible to get somewhere"); the shocks and setbacks of injury and uncertain convalescence; the confidence that comes from "understanding technique through and through"; the achievement of mastery. According to an insider like Margot Fonteyn (so it strikes an outsider and onlooker as well), *Dancing for Balanchine* is "the only book I know that really explains Balanchine's way of working and makes the technical details of class and rehearsal rivetingly interesting":

> [After a few years in NYCB] most of the dancing I saw outside the Company had little appeal for me. I needed to see the stretched positions, the straight back in arabesque, the crossed fifth positions, and the vast quantities of space covered by steps done so timidly elsewhere. Anything else looked quaint to me, at best.
>
> I later realized that, although much of what Balanchine taught had to do with his sense of aesthetics, it also served the very practical purpose of helping the dancer get through his ballets. It became urgently clear, for example, why we had to put our foot directly in front of us in tendu and why each tendu had to be done as a separate movement; why, when doing a *frappé*, the leg has to be stopped so sharply and held; why landing and taking off for *changement* has to be practiced from grand plié. We learned the answers to these and innumerable other questions by dancing in his ballets. We began to see how skills learned in his class were so essential for changing direction suddenly, making movements look quick and light or smooth and controlled. . . .

This aspect of the book—it's most of the book, and enlighteningly illustrated with page after page of sequence photographs—is indeed "rivetingly interesting"; and the person who makes it available to us is intelligent, thoughtful, unassuming, and very strong, a self-made if not born winner and champion. But "the Farrell years" that exasperated Hayden exasperated Ashley too, or at any rate "puzzled" and "mystified" her: "these instinctive dancers" who seek "opportunities for creativity," to whom "erratic tempos offer a chance to experiment with phrasing or even to add or drop steps. . . . I think

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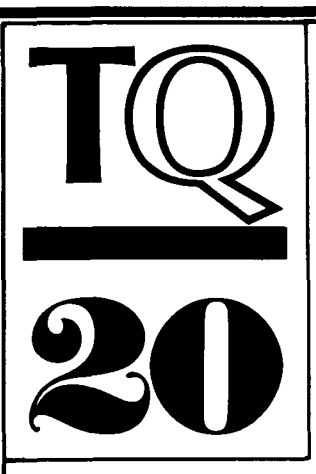

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this facility to create on the spur of the moment often derives more from personality than from physical ability. People who are good at repartee and have quick reactions to the unexpected often engage in this experimentation and risk-taking"; "those dancers who seemed to ignore, or even openly oppose, much of Balanchine's teachings and yet remained in his good graces. . . . Suzanne Farrell . . . broke the rules both on the stage and, more surprisingly, in class." When Ashley learns that Farrell after five years away will be attending performances in Saratoga, "I wanted to show her that her roles were being well danced and that life was going on without her"; but life without her suited Ashley better than it suited Balanchine, who restored Farrell to the company, and "I and others watched with dismay as Balanchine again cast her in all her old roles and gave her a lot of attention."

In *Balanchine's Ballerinas,* recollecting the circumstances of her return, Farrell comments that "those who were happy were happy and those who weren't weren't." "In many of Balanchine's ballets," says Ashley, "there is a woman who is distant and elusive. . . . That kind of woman is not in my nature, which is warm and more direct, but"—she asserts rather testily—"she is a type I understand, and I am certainly able to play that role." One such role is in *Chaconne*, set on Farrell by Balanchine to celestial music by Gluck, and some of the remote and dreamy winglike movements of the ballerina's arms and legs while she is being carried adagio by her partner across the stage must be considered to risk making her look to the profane imagination as if she is merely swimming or even—perish the thought!—riding a bicycle. When in February 1985 I saw Ashley do the role I was aware of the risk; when, later in the same week, I saw Farrell do it, I wasn't. Not all risk-taking is self-indulgent or impromptu; some of the most dangerous isn't unheard of in even the highest art; and it works best when it doesn't after the fact look like much of a risk.

In *Balanchine's Mozartiana*, a severe and professional book which describes almost literally step by step the making of Balanchine's last masterpiece as he set it on his favorite dancer (but which for most of those steps stays far ahead of the layman because too technical and lacking in keyed illustrations), the authors invariably and unequivocally define and distinguish Farrell's movements as if they are the examples to which all dancers aspire: "She rises onto pointe and unfolds her leg to the desired height with the smoothness of a swan stretching its neck." Ashley is a dazzling and exuberant allegro dancer (as Farrell is also, among her other talents), above all in the marvelous *Ballo della Regina* in which Balanchine displayed and exalted all her virtues. But after one of her performances in another role the conductor, Hugo Fiorato, said, "Don't smile so much"; and she didn't understand. A nice girl, a lovely girl. Balanchine remarked about a performance of hers that it was "too sweet"; and after another, " 'too sweet, dear,' he said once again. In a feeble voice I finally said, 'Mr. B, I just don't know what you mean.' " Questions, questions. "What did he really mean? What, in fact, was my problem?" But he couldn't or wouldn't explain.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

History had suddenly dealt two new cards into the pack—democracy and industrialism. By the 1830s both were imminent, if not actually present. Democracy here means male adult suffrage moving—as many belived it must move—towards equality of condition; and it was that alarming tendency that was the main theme of Tocqueville's great book. "America was only the frame, democracy the picture," as he put it. In the United States he had seen the future, and it worked—but not as he might wish. Democracy was wormed in the bud.

—George Watson, "Tocqueville and the Burden of Liberty," p. 370.

So one must question the extent to which Welty's use of voice is distinctively Southern or regional. When Faulkner pulls out the stops of his oratorical rhetoric, the shades of several generations come to life and flags are trampled in the dust. When Flannery O'Connor writes a personal letter ("The Easter Bunny brought my mother a two-ton truck") or hears a character talk ("You take a boy thirteen year old is equal in meanness to a man twict his age"), the voice remains essentially the same. But in Welty's fiction one must differentiate the colloquial voices ("If you're so smart, why ain't you rich?") from the inward voice of the story itself.

—Dean Flower, "Eudora Welty Come from Away," p. 477.

Obviously they all loved him ("He was adorable," sighs one of them), and he loved many or most of them (Diaghilev, who had other proclivities, was scornful of Balanchine's "morbid interest in women"); but all of them and he too spent most of their time and energy in classes and rehearsals: "If you marry a ballerina," he said to an interviewer, "you never have to worry about whether she's running around with somebody else or anything like that. You always know exactly where she is—in the studio, working."

—Marvin Mudrick, "The King and His Queens," p. 524.

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